BLACK-EYED SUSAN

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"I'M HERE," SAID THE VOICE. "I'VE COME. I'M PHIL."

BLACK-EYED SUSAN

BY

ETHEL CALVERT PHILLIPS

AUTHOR OF “WEE ANN” AND “LITTLE FRIEND LYDIA”

WITH DRAWINGS BY HAROLD CUE

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN CO BOSTON & NEW YORK

BLACK-EYED SUSAN

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BLACK-EYED SUSAN

CHAPTER I—BLACK-EYED SUSAN OF FEATHERBED LANE

A pair of black eyes, a head covered with short brown curls, two red cheeks, and a tip-tilted nose—that was Susan. A warm heart, a pair of eager little hands always ready to help, little feet that tripped willingly about on errands—that was Susan, too.

"The best little girl in Putnam County," said Grandfather, snuggling Susan up so close that his gray beard tickled her nose and made her laugh.

"My little comfort," said Grandmother, with a hand on Susan's bobbing curls that simply couldn't be made to lie flat no matter how much you brushed and brushed.

Susan herself didn't say very much to this, but oh, how she did love Grandfather, from the crown of his big slouch hat to the toes of his high leather boots that he delighted to wear both winter and summer!

As for Grandmother, who could help loving her, with her merry smile, her soft pink cheeks shaded by a row of little white curls, and her jar of cinnamon cookies on the low shelf in the pantry? Yes, her jar of cinnamon cookies on the low shelf in the pantry, for, somehow, in Susan's mind, Grandmother and the cinnamon cookies were pleasantly mingled and together made up the love and comfort and cheer that to Susan meant home.

The house Susan lived in with Grandmother and Grandfather Whiting and Snuff the dog was a broad, low, white house that stood far back from the road at the end of Featherbed Lane.

Susan thought this the funniest name she had ever heard.

As she and Grandfather, hand in hand, would carefully pick their way over the stones that covered the road from house to highway, she never tired of asking, "Grandfather, why do you call it Featherbed Lane? It's not a bit like a feather bed. It's as hard as hard can be."

"Because there are just as many stones in this lane as there are feathers in a feather bed," Grandfather would answer gravely. "Some day you must count them and see."

"But how many feathers are there in a feather bed?" Susan would ask. "You must count them, too," was Grandfather's reply.

At the end of the lane, on the roadside, stood a little house with three windows, a front door, and a pointed roof with a chimney. This was Grandfather's law office, and here he was to be found at work every day, coming up to the house only at meal-time. Inside there was one big room, not only lined all round with books, but with books overflowing their shelves and piled upon the chairs and tumbled upon the floor. Grandfather's big desk was drawn up close to the windows, and as Susan passed in and out of the gate she never failed to smile and wave her hand in greeting.

If Grandfather were not busy, he would invite her in, and then Susan on the floor would build houses of the heavy law books, using Grandfather's shabby old hassock for table or bed as the case might be.

One cool May afternoon Susan climbed upon Grandfather's lap as he sat in front of the coal fire that burned in the office grate every day that gave the least excuse for it.

Grandmother had gone calling in the village, and Susan was staying with Grandfather until her return. Susan cuddled her head down on Grandfather's broad shoulder.

"Say 'William Ti Trimity' for me, please," said she coaxingly.

So Grandfather obediently repeated,

William Ti Trimity, he's a good fisherman;
Catches his hens and puts them in pens.
Some lays eggs and some lays none.
Wire, briar, limber lock,
Three geese in a flock.
    One flew east, and one flew west,
    And one flew over the cuckoo's nest.

Susan gave Grandfather's cheek a pat by way of thanks.

"Sing to me now, please," was the next command.

Obligingly Grandfather tuned up and sang in his sweet old voice—

It rains and it hails and it's cold stormy weather.
In comes the farmer drinking up the cider.
You be the reaper and I'll be the binder,
I've lost my true love, and right here I find her.

This was an old favorite, and it never failed to delight Susan to have Grandfather in great surprise discover her as the lost true love "right here" in his arms.

"Now, 'Chickamy,'" said Susan, smoothing herself down after the vigorous hug she felt called upon to bestow.

Chickamy, Chickamy, crany crow,
Went to the well to wash his toe.
When he came back the black-eyed chicken was gone—

said Grandfather in a mysterious voice.

"Can't you remember any more of it, Grandfather?" implored Susan. "Don't you know who Chickamy was, or who stole the black-eyed chicken? I do wish I knew."

"No, I can't remember," said Grandfather regretfully. "You know all I know about it, Susan. Only I do think Chickamy was a foolish fellow to wash his toe just at that minute. Why didn't he take the black-eyed chicken with him or leave somebody at home to take care of him?"

"Yes, it is a pity," sighed the little girl. "Or why didn't he wash his toe in the tub at home? Well, anyway, Grandfather, now tell about the time I came to live with you." And Susan re-settled herself comfortably as Grandfather slipped down in his chair and stretched out his feet toward the low fire.

"It was a cold winter night," began Grandfather, with the ease of one who has told his story many times, "and the ground was covered with snow. All the little rabbits were snuggled down in their holes in the ground trying to keep warm. All the little birds were cuddled together in their nests under the eaves. All the little boys and girls were sound asleep tucked in their warm beds—"

"All but one," interrupted Susan.

"Yes, all but one," agreed Grandfather, "and she was riding along in a sleigh, and the sleigh-bells went *jingle jangle, jingle jangle*, and the horses' feet went *crunch, crunch, crunch*, through the snow."

"Now, tell was I cold," prompted Susan, as Grandfather paused to spread his silk handkerchief over his head to keep off the draught.

"The little girl wasn't one bit cold," went on Grandfather smoothly, "because she was dressed in fur from head to foot. She wore a white fur coat and a white fur cap that came so far down over her face that all you could see was the tip of

her nose."

"And that was red," supplied Susan.

"And she had a pair of white furry mittens on her hands, and her feet were wrapped in a white fur rug.

"Well, by and by the horse turned in a lane that was so packed with snow that you couldn't tell whether it was a Featherbed Lane or not. *Crunch, crunch, crunch*, went the horses' feet, *jingle jangle, jingle jangle*, went the bells until they were almost up to the white house at the end of the lane.

"Now in that white house there sat a grandmother and a grandfather before the fire.

"Presently the grandmother laid down her knitting.

"'I think I hear sleigh-bells in the lane,' said she.

"The grandfather put down his book.

"'I think I hear horses' feet,' said he.

"Then the grandmother rose and looked out of the window.

"'I see a lantern,' said she, peering out through the snowflakes, for it had begun to snow again.

"At that the grandfather flung open the door and in came—"

"Me!" exclaimed Susan. "And I didn't cry one bit. Did I?"

"Mercy, no," said Grandfather, opening his eyes wide at the very thought. "You just winked and blinked in the light, and when I held out my arms you came straight to me."

"And what did you say, Grandfather?"

"I said, 'My little black-eyed Susan.'"

"And that has been my name ever since," said Susan with an air of satisfaction. "Now, tell what Grandmother was doing."

"Grandmother had both arms round your father who carried you in, for once upon a time he was her little boy," concluded Grandfather.

"And you were so glad to see me that night because my mother had gone to heaven, weren't you?" mused Susan. "And then my father went away to build a big bridge, and then he went to the war and he never came back."

A silence fell for a moment upon Grandfather Whiting and Susan as they gazed into the fire, and then the little girl stirred and spoke.

"I think I will go and play with Flip awhile, Grandfather," said she.

She slipped down from Grandfather's lap, and, leaving him to fall into a doze, proceeded to set up housekeeping with Flip, her rag doll, behind a pile of books in a corner.

Flip and Snuff, the shaggy brown setter, were Susan's constant playmates, for the house in Featherbed Lane stood a little way out of the village and there were no children living near by.

The other side of the Lane, on a little knoll, perched the old Tallman house, empty since last autumn when Miss Eliza Tallman had gone down to the village to live with her niece.

Across the way and up the road stood the deserted little old schoolhouse, long ago abandoned for the new brick building in the heart of the village.

But, although Susan had no near neighbors and often longed for some one her own age to play with, still she dearly loved the lively Snuff who could outrace her any day, who played a skillful game of hide and seek, and who returned tenfold the strength of her love with all the might of his affectionate pink tongue, his briskly wagging tail, and his faithful little heart.

As for Flip, it is hard to say what Susan would have done without her. She was a long thin wobbly rag doll, with a head flat like a turtle's, and not a single spear of hair on it. But to Susan, her brown eyes were the tenderest and her rosy lips the sweetest to be found anywhere, and it was into Flip's sympathetic ear that Susan poured her griefs and troubles, great or small. She was Susan's bedfellow, too, lying outside the coverlid where her little mother might easily put out her hand and touch her in the night.

Susan had other good friends, too. There was the newel post opposite the front door at home. Susan had never thought anything about the newel post until one day, playing "lady come to see" with a shawl on for a long skirt, she had tripped and bumped her head against the post. Now, this was fully six months ago, and when Susan was only a little girl, as she would have been sure to explain, and so she did what other little girls have done before. Feeling the newel post to blame for her fall, she pounded it with both hands and kicked it with both feet. And suddenly, in the midst of the pounding and kicking, Susan spied a big dent in the side of the post. Had she done that? Oh! what a mean, a cruel girl she was! She hurried upstairs for her new hair-ribbon, which she tied round what she called the newel post's neck, and sitting down she tried to smooth out the dent and soothe the newel post's hurt feelings at the same time. Perhaps Grandmother could have explained that dent as made by a trunk carelessly carried upstairs, but Susan always believed that she had made it. She rarely passed the newel post without giving it a pat, and, sitting on the stairs, she and Flip and the newel post often had many a pleasant chat together.

And there was Snowball, the rubber cat, that had been Susan's favorite toy when she was a baby. Snowball may once have deserved her name. But now she was a dingy gray that not even frequent scrubbings with soap and water could freshen. She had lost her tail, she had lost her squeak, but Susan was loyal to her old pet and still lavished tender care upon her.

Then, too, there was the shawl dolly. Most of the time the dolly was a plain little black-and-white checked shawl spread over Grandmother's shoulders

or neatly folded on the hatbox in Grandmother's closet. But whenever Susan was a little ailing, Grandmother folded the shawl into a soft comfortable dolly, who cuddled nicely and who never failed to give to Susan the comfort needed.

Just now Susan was playing school in the corner. She was the teacher, and Flip and the hassock, who this afternoon was a fat little boy named Benny, were the scholars.

"Flippy, who made you?" asked the teacher.

"God," answered Flippy promptly.

Susan made her talk in a squeaky little voice.

"Benny, how much is two and two?" was the next question.

But Benny didn't answer. Perhaps he couldn't.

"Benny, how much is two and two?" repeated the teacher loudly.

Still no answer.

This was dreadful, and Susan felt that she must be severe. Shaking her finger warningly at disobedient Benny, she went to Grandfather's desk to borrow his long black ruler, and, glancing out of the window, she saw a big red wagon toiling slowly up the road.

"It's the circus!" exclaimed Susan. "Grandfather, wake up, the circus is coming."

Grandfather woke himself up with a shake and peered out of the window, over Susan's head.

"No, that is not the circus," said he. "That's a moving-van. Somebody's furniture is packed inside that wagon. Hello, they're turning in at the Tallman place. Liza must have rented it."

And Grandfather and Susan, with great interest, watched the heavy van turn and jolt along the driveway that led to the house next door.

"Here comes another van," called Susan, whose sharp eyes spied the red wagon far down the road.

This van bore what the movers call "a swinging load." On the back of the wagon were tied all the pieces of furniture that couldn't be crammed or squeezed into the van itself.

The horses pulled and strained up the little hill until they were directly opposite Susan's gate, and then, with a crash, something fell off the back of the wagon.

"Look, look!" cried Susan, hopping up and down. "Look, Grandfather, it's a rocking-horse!"

Sure enough, a dapple gray rocking-horse, with a gay red saddle, was rocking away in the middle of the road as if he meant to reach Banbury Cross before nightfall.

"There will be somebody for me to play with!" cried Susan, climbing up on

Grandfather's desk in her excitement. "Maybe I will have a ride on that rocking-horse. Won't there be somebody for me to play with, Grandfather?"

And Susan, her eyes shining, put both arms around Grandfather's neck and gave him a great hug.

"It looks that way," said Grandfather, as soon as Susan let him breathe again. "It looks as if that rocking-horse was about your size, too. But here comes your grandmother. Perhaps she has heard something about it in the village."

Like a flash Susan was off down the road, and by the time Grandfather had put on his hat and shut the office door Susan had learned all the news that Grandmother had to tell.

"Grandmother knows all about it," called Susan, flying up the road again. "Miss Liza Tallman has rented her house for a year. And, Grandfather, there is a little boy as old as me and his name is Philip Vane."

CHAPTER II—OVER THE GARDEN WALL

Philip Vane! The words flashed into Susan's mind as soon as she opened her eyes the next morning, Philip Vane—the new little boy next door! And Susan jumped out of bed and, running to the window, peered eagerly over at the old Tallman house.

Yes, some one was already up and stirring, for smoke was pouring out of the kitchen chimney, but there was no sign to be seen of any little boy.

Breakfast over, Susan hurried through her daily tasks about the house, and then ran out to the chicken-yard, with her bowl of chicken-feed under her arm. She waited until the fowls, with their usual squawkings and cluckings, had gathered about her feet, and addressed them solemnly.

"I've a piece of news for you," said Susan, "and you are not going to have one bite of breakfast until I've told you. There is a little boy coming to live next door, and his name is Philip Vane. We are going to play together and be friends. Aren't you glad?"

Old Frizzly, so named because her feathers grew the wrong way, could no longer restrain her impatience at this delay of her meal. She uttered an extra loud squawk and flapped her wings wrathfully. But Susan accepted it as an answer to her question.

"Old Frizzly is the only one of you with any manners at all," said she reprovingly. "You are greedy, and you are rude, and you don't care a bit whether I have any one to play with or not."

And, hastily emptying her bowl, Susan departed to station herself upon the low stone wall that separated the Tallman house from her own. She saw heads pass and repass the open windows, sounds of hammering floated out upon the sweet spring air, rugs were vigorously shaken on the little back porch. The butcher's cart rumbled noisily past on the main road, and a slim lady, with fair hair and a long blue apron, stepped out on the porch and, shading her eyes with her hand, gazed down the driveway as if she were expecting some one.

But, in spite of these interesting sights and sounds, Susan felt disappointed, for not a single peep did she have of the new little boy.

"Did Miss Liza say there was a little boy, Grandmother?" asked Susan, coming into the house at dinner-time so low in her mind that she dragged patient Flippy along by one arm, her limp feet trailing on the ground behind her.

"Why, yes," answered Grandmother, gazing into the oven at a pan of nicely browned biscuit. "I told you yesterday what she said, Susan. 'A little boy about the age of your Susan,' said she. Now run to the door for me and see whether Grandfather is coming. I want him to carry over this plate of biscuit to Mrs. Vane to show ourselves neighborly, and you shall go along with him if you like."

Susan needed no second invitation. She skipped ahead of Grandfather as they went through the low place made in the stone wall for Grandmother and Miss Tallman to step through easily. But when they reached the doorway, and Mrs. Vane stood before them, she shyly hid behind Grandfather's great leather boots.

She listened to the grown-up talk with ears wide open for some mention of a person her own age, but it was not until Grandfather turned to go that she felt bold enough to slip her hand in his and give it a little squeeze as if to remind him why she had come.

"Oh, yes," said Grandfather, understanding the squeeze perfectly and so proving himself to Susan the wisest man in the world. "This is my little granddaughter Susan, Mrs. Vane. She was very much interested in a rocking-horse that fell from one of your vans yesterday."

"That was Phil's rocking-horse," said Mrs. Vane, smiling kindly down into Susan's big black eyes, at this moment half friendly and half shy. "Philip is my little boy, and he will be so glad of a next-door neighbor. He has had no one to

play with in the city, and he has been very ill, too, but I know he will enjoy himself here where he can run and shout as much as he likes, and I'm sure he will soon be well, now that he can play out in this good sun and air."

Susan looked all about her in search of a little boy running and shouting as much as he liked, but Phil's mother met her glance with a shake of the head.

"No, he isn't here yet," said she. "But I expect him any minute. His father is going to bring him up from the city this morning."

Filled with the hope of seeing Phil arrive, Susan hurried through her dinner, but as she left the house and started toward the garden wall, the sight of Snuff limping dismally along on three legs drove all other thoughts from her mind.

"Grandfather, Grandfather, Snuffy's hurt," she called, and, putting her arms around her shaggy playfellow, she tried to help him up the back steps.

Snuff whimpered a little to gain sympathy, but he bore the pain without flinching when Grandfather gently pulled the cruel splinter from his foot, and washed and bound up the wound. Susan, remembering Snuff's sweet tooth, begged a bowl of custard from Grandmother, and she was enjoying Snuff's pleasure in the treat when a voice fell upon her ears.

"I'm here," said the voice. "I've come. I'm Phil."

Susan sprang to her feet and faced the thinnest little boy she had ever seen.

"He's as thin as a bone," thought she, borrowing an expression from Grandmother.

But the thin little face owned a pair of honest blue eyes, and a smile so wide that you couldn't help smiling back even if you happened to be feeling very cross. And, as Susan didn't feel cross in the least, you may imagine how broadly she smiled upon her new neighbor.

"Is this your dog?" asked Phil, eyeing Snuff's bandage with respectful interest. "I'm going to have a dog and a cat and maybe some hens and chickens, too."

Susan related Snuff's accident, and the invalid, feeling all eyes upon him, dropped his head heavily to the ground with a deep sigh and a mournful thud of his tail. Then he opened one eye to see the effect upon his audience.

Susan and Phil broke into laughter at such sly tricks, and Snuff, delighted with his success, beat his tail violently upon the piazza floor.

"I brought over my Noah's Ark," announced Phil, taking from under his arm the gayly painted little house upon which Susan's eyes had been fixed from the first. "We'll play, if you like."

And Susan and Phil, with the ease of old friends, proceeded to marshal the strange little toy animals in line, two by two, behind Mr. and Mrs. Noah and their stiff and stolid family.

"Now you sing a song," said Phil. "Do you know it?" And without waiting

for Susan's shake of the head he burst loudly into tune:

"They marched the animals, two by two,
One wide river to cross—
The elephant and the kangaroo,
One wide river to cross."

"But you see the kangaroo won't stand up, so I have to put the tiger with the elephant. Then you sing it this way"

And he took up the chant again:

"They marched the animals, two by two,
One wide river to cross—
The elephant and the tigeroo,
One wide river to cross."

"Do you like it?" asked Phil, looking up into Susan's face with a smile.

Susan nodded with an energy that set her curls a-bobbing.

"There's Grandmother in the window," said she. "Let's go in and see her."

Grandmother put down her knitting to welcome Philip, and bade Susan pass the cinnamon cookies.

"I know my mother likes me to eat them," announced Phil, silent until he had disposed of his cooky, "because she wants me to grow fat."

"Perhaps she would like you to take another one," said Grandmother, hiding a smile and passing the plate again.

"I was sick," went on Phil, whose tongue seemed loosened by the second cinnamon cooky. "I was sick so long I nearly all melted away. My father calls me Spindle Shanks. But I'm going to grow big and fat now—if I eat enough," he added with his eyes on the plate of cakes.

Each with a cooky in hand and an extra one in Phil's pocket, Susan escorted her new friend down Featherbed Lane in the hope that Grandfather would invite them into the office.

He was writing busily, but when Susan and Phil, clinging to the window-sill, all but pressed their noses against the pane, Grandfather put down his pen and motioned them to come in.

"How do you do, sir," said Grandfather as Phil shook hands in true manly fashion. "So you are my next-door neighbor. I hope we shall be good friends."

"Oh, he will, Grandfather," said Susan, speaking up for her new acquaintance, who, standing speechless, allowed his gaze to travel from the high boots up to the quizzical brown eyes looking so pleasantly down upon him.

"Well, neighbor, we shall have to fatten you up a little, I'm thinking," remarked Grandfather heartily, observing thin little Phil in his turn.

"Yes," agreed Phil, finding his tongue at last and taking a nibble of his cooky as if to begin the fattening process at once.

"I mean to eat and grow fat. My mother wants me to; she said so. My father calls me Spindle Shanks," he added, as if rather proud of his new name.

"Is that so?" said Grandfather with interest. "Now I shouldn't have thought of calling you that. But I might have called you 'Pint o' Peanuts' if any one had asked me."

Phil and Susan went off into a fit of laughter at this funny name, and when they recovered Grandfather remarked gravely:

"The best thing to do in a case like this is to build up an appetite. Susan, you go with Philip up to his house and ask his mother if she will let him take a little drive with Parson Drew and you and me over to Green Valley. Be sure to tell her it's to work up an appetite. Then cut across and tell Grandmother we are going to the Green Valley Court-House and that we shall be home by five o'clock."

Grandfather was forced to stand on the doorstep and call the last part of his directions after Susan. For at the first mention of a drive she had caught Phil's hand and started on a run up the driveway leading to his house.

Mrs. Vane hastily polished off her son with a corner of the kitchen roller towel, snuggled him into a warm sweater, and sent word to Grandfather that she was very glad to have Philip go driving, though he didn't need to work up an appetite she was sure.

Grandmother made Susan hunt for her straw hat which, strange to say, was not to be found upon its accustomed nail. Grandmother and Phil searched downstairs, while Susan ran about frantically upstairs, so afraid they would be late that she could only half look. But at last she discovered her hat upside down under the bed, with rubber Snowball taking a nap in it, just as Susan had put her to bed the day before.

In spite of this delay the children were in good time, and with Susan wedged tightly on the seat between Grandfather and the minister, and Phil standing between the great leather boots with either hand on Grandfather's knee, they drove off in fine style.

Mr. Drew was the village minister, a young man with a pleasant manner and a twinkle in his kind blue eyes. He and Grandfather were special friends. They liked to talk together, though they rarely agreed, and sometimes became so excited in their talk that you might almost think they were quarreling. But of course Susan knew better than that.

Grandfather's horse, big bony Nero, had hurt his knee and had been turned out to grass to rest and recover. So this afternoon Mr. Drew held the reins and

chirruped gently to his little brown Molly as she carried them briskly along the road.

As the grown-up talk rumbled on over her head, Susan peered out like a bright-eyed bird, and at every interesting landmark or familiar spot she called, "Look, Phil, look!" until from its frequent turning there was some danger that Phil's head might snap completely off its frail little neck.

"There is the old schoolhouse, Phil," called Susan. "We can play house on the doorstep.

"And here is the row of cherry trees. By and by we will come here with a pail.

"And, Phil, the crossest old cow lives in this field. Don't you ever come here by yourself. Once I only climbed up on the fence to look at her, and she put down her head and ran at me. And how she did moo—as cross as anything."

"I'm not afraid of her," said Phil stoutly, as, safe behind the shelter of Grandfather's boots and bowling swiftly along the road, he cast a defiant look at the surly bossy securely fastened by a rope to a stout stake in the ground. "Maybe I'll take you there sometime. I won't let her hurt you."

But the cow was left behind them, and Susan called Phil to look at the poultry farm, with its ducks and geese, its hens and chickens, cackling cheerfully and running about in amiable confusion.

Now they were nearing the town of Green Valley, and down the hill and over the bridge they rumbled to stop before the imposing stone Court-House, with its parking-space for automobiles and its row of hitching-posts, to one of which was tied little brown Molly.

Susan danced impatiently up and down as Grandfather descended heavily to the sidewalk.

"Oh, Grandfather," said she, catching hold of his hand, "I want to take Philly to Madame Bonnet's. May I? Please say 'yes.'"

"To be sure," answered Grandfather, feeling in his pocket as he spoke. "It will be a good place for you to wait. Here's ten cents apiece. Spend it carefully, and be sure you don't get lost on the way."

Susan laughed as she caught Phil by the arm and dragged him off. Lost on the way to Madame Bonnet's! when every one in the world knew it was just across the street from the Court-House.

Once safely over the crossing Susan stopped and pointed:

"Look, Phil," said she. "It's the nicest place you ever knew. Here it is. Here's Madame Bonnet's shop."

CHAPTER III—MADAME BONNET'S SHOP

Madame Bonnet's shop was so small that if you hadn't known it was there you might easily have walked past it and never seen it at all.

It was one story high, with a low front door, and panes of glass in the one window so tiny that it was difficult to see the wares that Madame Bonnet had for sale. But if you shut one eye and pressed the other close to the glass, you were well repaid for your trouble, for Madame Bonnet kept a toy shop the like of which was not to be found anywhere, though you traveled the world over in search of it.

It was not that the shop was large, because it wasn't. It was not that Madame Bonnet had many toys for sale, because she hadn't. But the children said you could buy at Madame Bonnet's what you couldn't buy anywhere else. And though the grown people sometimes stated, and perhaps truly, that Madame Bonnet hadn't bought a penny's worth of new stock in twenty-five years, the children were well satisfied, and no doubt that is the true test of a toy shop, after all.

"Oh, Phil," cried Susan, pressing one eye against the window, "do look at the china doll carriage, and the little doll's lamp with a pink shade and all, and that beautiful pair of vases that would just go on the mantel in my doll's house. I mean if I had a doll's house," added Susan truthfully.

But Phil, twisting and turning and almost standing on his head, was calling out:

"Look at the china boy rowing in the boat—with all his bundles, too. What do you think is in them, Susan? Do tell me. What is in that yellow striped bundle? What do you think is in that one?"

"Something for him to eat, I guess," said Susan sensibly. "Let's go inside and look around."

Madame Bonnet was comfortably knitting in the rear of the shop, and didn't think of getting up to wait upon her customers.

"Well, Susan Whiting," said she, gazing at the children over her spectacles. "How do you do? Is your grandmother well? And so your grandfather is going to call by for you. I suppose he came in to the Court-House on business. And this is the little boy who has come to live next door to you, is it? Well, my dears, I hope you will find something you like here. Just walk around, and if you want to know about anything bring it to me. My knee has been so bad with rheumatism that I don't get up if I can help it."

And Madame Bonnet returned to her knitting, apparently forgetting the children, who walked about on tiptoe eyeing the toys and handling everything within reach.

Madame Bonnet had been born and brought up in the town of Green Valley and had never journeyed farther away than fifty miles. People were somewhat surprised, therefore, when, one fine day, the girl they had always known as Mary Bonnet had opened her little shop, and had raised over the front door a sign which boldly read, "Madame Bonnet."

"There is French blood in me somewhere, I'm sure," said she. "And I don't see why I shouldn't call myself 'Madame,' if I like."

And now that Madame Bonnet was an old lady with white hair and spectacles, most people had forgotten that she had ever borne any other name.

"Phil," said Susan, standing entranced before a low shelf, "won't you come and look at this doll?"

In the center of a large square of cardboard was sewed a bisque doll, whose long flaxen braid hung over one shoulder and reached to the tips of her dimpled toes. Surrounding her, also sewed on the card, was her wardrobe, consisting of a pink dress, a pink hat, and a pair of pink kid boots, a similar costume in blue, a Red Riding Hood cape, and a green silk umbrella.

Susan fairly held her breath before this vision of loveliness. But Phil was spellbound at the other end of the shop—and no wonder.

In a long glass tube, full of water, was a little red imp, even to horns and tail, and, instructed by Susan how to press upon the rubber top, Phil soon learned to make the imp execute a gay dance or move slowly up and down in his narrow, watery prison.

"Come along," urged Susan, tugging at Phil's arm. "There are lots more things to see. Look at this little piano. It has four keys—*tink-a-link-a-link*! And here's a swimming boy—how pretty he is!" And Susan carefully lifted the light little figure, who lay with rosy hands and feet outstretched all ready for a splash.

"I like the animals."

And Phil paused before a table laden with small trays on each of which reposed a family of tiny bisque animals. There sat demure Mrs. Pussy and her five tortoise-shell kittens. Four timid little lambs huddled close to the Mother

Sheep as if asking protection from a herd of big gray elephants, who, in turn, trumpeted silently with upturned trunks, at the disgrace of being placed next a placid family of black-and-white pigs. There were ducks and chickens, camels and donkeys, cows and horses—sitting, standing, and lying side by side in a peaceful and united frame of mind not often to be met with in this world.

Phil carried a tray of fat snub-nosed little animals back to Madame Bonnet to find out what they were.

"Land sakes!" exclaimed Madame Bonnet. "Don't you know what they are? They're dogs, pug dogs. Didn't you ever see one? Susan, didn't you ever see a pug dog? Well, I don't know as they are as common as they used to be. Ladies used to like them for pets." And Madame Bonnet shook her head over the way times had changed since she was a girl.

The children wandered round and round, entranced afresh at each table and shelf.

There was a small wooden clock, like the timepiece in Susan's kitchen at home, whose pendulum swung gayly to and fro if only you helped it a little with your finger. There were dolls' hats made by Madame Bonnet herself, that varied in style from a knitted tam-o'-shanter to a strange turban-like affair with a jaunty chicken feather in the top. There was sheet after sheet of paper dolls that surely belonged to the days of long ago, for the ladies wore their hair in a way that Grandmother would have recognized as a waterfall, and the little girl dolls had droll pantalettes hanging below their skirts.

There was a beautiful sawdust and china doll, whose wavy black china hair was piled high upon her head, whose strapped china boots gracefully took "first position" when she was held upright, and whose rosy lips smiled sweetly in spite of the fact that her bright green silk dress was neatly pasted on, so that it wouldn't come off, no matter what the emergency. Perhaps the fancy gilt paper trimming on dolly's frock kept her cheerful. Perhaps Susan's open admiration warmed her chilly little china heart and helped her to forget any discomfort she might suffer.

At any rate, Susan passed reluctantly from her side to view the doll's furniture, and there she entered into such a delightful wilderness of chairs, beds, tables, and sofas as would be difficult to describe. Parlor sets with red and blue velvet trimmings; bedroom sets quite complete, down to the cradle rocking comfortably away beside the mother's big bed; rocking-chairs; baby's high chair; a bookcase filled with tiny paper books; a stove with lids that really lifted off.

"Oh, I can't go home!" cried Susan, when Grandfather opened the door and, stooping low to save his head, came into the shop.

"Five minutes more," said Grandfather, as he sat down for a little talk with his old friend Madame Bonnet.

"Oh, Phil, only five minutes more." And in that five minutes Susan flew

around like a distracted hen, making up her mind what her purchase should be.

Phil had been absorbed for some time in a pile of paper books with gay red-and-white pictured covers, and he now came forward with his selection. "The Story of Naughty Adolphus," read Grandfather, and gazed with interest upon the picture of Adolphus, to whom "naughty" seemed a mild word to apply. For not only was Adolphus dancing up and down in a fit of temper, and all but striking his meek and shrinking little nurse who stood terror stricken close by; but it was very evident that Adolphus refused to have his hair brushed, his face washed, or finger nails trimmed. All this the picture showed quite plainly, and innocent Phil gazed at it with a virtuous air, for, in his worst moments, he felt sure he had never even approached "Naughty Adolphus."

"It looks interesting," announced Grandfather soberly. "I think you've made a good choice. Susan, are you ready?"

"Look," murmured Susan, faint with admiration. "Look what I've found."

It was a white china egg, and, lifting off the top, there lay a little dolly, as snug as could be.

"It's beautiful," said Susan. And bold with gratitude, she stood on tiptoe and placed a kiss upon Madame Bonnet's wrinkled cheek.

"Well!" said Madame Bonnet, taken aback for the moment, but liking it nevertheless. "If I had a good knee I'd step down cellar for a bottle of my raspberry vinegar to treat you all. How are your knees, Mr. Whiting?"

"Young as a boy's," returned Grandfather, rubbing them as he spoke. "But here's Parson Drew. Suppose we let him step down. He doesn't know that he has any knees."

So Parson Drew, as fond as Susan of raspberry vinegar, obligingly "stepped down cellar," and brought up a tall rosy bottle the contents of which, under Madame Bonnet's careful eye, he poured into thin little glasses with a gold band about the top.

"Well," said Grandfather, after he had actually turned the bottle upside down to prove to Susan and Phil that there was not a single drop left in it, "I'm afraid the time has come for us to go."

And after many good-byes and messages for Grandmother, the party moved toward the door.

Parson Drew led the way, and, as he opened the door, something from outside, with a clatter and clash, darted into the shop, whirled down the aisle, and subsided with a jangle into a dark corner at the back of the store.

Madame Bonnet, completely forgetting her bad knee, mounted her chair in a twinkling and stood holding her skirts about her feet, calling—

"Help! Help! Help!"

Susan, clutching tight to her eggshell baby, tried to climb up into Grandfa-

ther's arms, while Phil, making himself as small as possible, hid under a convenient table.

Grandfather was peering into the dark corner where the clattering object, now silent and motionless, could be faintly seen.

Suddenly Grandfather put back his head and laughed.

"It's a cat," said he; "a poor forlorn little gray cat. And we were all afraid of a cat."

He gave a second look, and then he spoke in a different tone.

"Tut, tut, tut," said Grandfather, as if he were angry.

He gently moved toward the trembling pussy, but before Madame Bonnet could step down from her chair or Phil come out from under the table, in from the street walked Mr. Drew, whom no one had missed until now. He held by the coat-collar a freckled, red-headed boy, and he was pushing him along in no very gentle way.

"This is the boy who did the deed," said Mr. Drew, and he sounded angry in the same way Grandfather did. "I thought I would catch him enjoying his fun if I stepped outside, and, sure enough, there he was, doubled up with laughter and slapping himself on the knee at the joke. A fine joke," added Mr. Drew, giving the boy a little shake, "a fine joke—tormenting a poor cat."

"The other boys were in it, too," whined the culprit, squirming, "only they ran away."

"That doesn't excuse you," answered Mr. Drew sternly. "I have a notion to tie the tin can on you. 'It's only for a joke,' you know. That is what you told me."

"No, no," whimpered the boy, jerking and twisting about. "Let me go. I'll give you five cents if you do. I'll give you ten cents if you let me go." And he pulled from his pocket a handful of coins and held them out on his grimy palm.

"Is it yours?" asked Mr. Drew. "Is it your money?"

The boy nodded.

"Good!" said Mr. Drew. "Then I'll take it." And he coolly slipped the coins into his pocket.

"Now," said he to the boy, tightening his grip on his collar, "you come with me, and we will spend this money on a treat for poor pussy. And you shall watch her enjoy it, too."

When Mr. Drew returned with his unwilling companion, he found Madame Bonnet composedly knitting in her chair, the rest of the group eyeing pussy, still motionless in her corner.

"Now, Tim," said Parson Drew cheerfully, to his sulky, red-haired friend, "you shall have the pleasure of giving pussy the milk and the cat-meat which you bought for her with your money."

Tim silently spread the feast and retreated a few steps.

"Come, puss, puss," encouraged Madame Bonnet in her comfortable voice, "drink your milk."

And pussy timidly put out her pink tongue and drank the milk thirstily.

"You needn't be afraid to leave her to me," observed Madame Bonnet to Grandfather, who was looking at his watch. "I like a cat, when I know it's a cat and not a whirlwind. I'll take off the can when she is more used to me, and I'll keep her here a bit till I find her a home."

Outside the shop, the party halted once more.

"Don't play any more tricks like this, will you, Tim?" asked Mr. Drew. "And shake hands."

Tim nodded and thrust out his hard little hand. He grinned cheerfully up at Mr. Drew, and was off down the street, whistling shrilly between his fingers as he ran.

"When I get home," confided Susan in Grandfather's ear, as she sat on his lap on the homeward ride, "I'm going to tell Snowball all about it, and about that bad boy, and then I guess she will be glad that she has lost her tail. Don't you?"

CHAPTER IV—THE SQUASH BABY

Susan was very unhappy. She stood by her bedroom window, kicking the wall, and at every kick she said, "mean, mean, mean."

It was all about a little berry pie. Grandmother had made for Susan's dinner a saucer pie. It was juicy and brown and had fancy little crimps all about the edge. It looked almost too good to eat.

But instead of being pleased and thanking Grandmother, Susan had scowled up her face at sight of it, and had muttered,

"I don't like the little pie. I want a piece of the big one."

Now, there is no telling why Susan acted in that way. I don't believe she could have explained it herself. The words seemed to pop out of her mouth, her face seemed to snarl itself up, and, for no reason at all she suddenly felt very angry at the poor, pretty little saucer pie.

And after this dreadful speech, nobody spoke.

Susan felt Grandfather looking at her over his spectacles. She saw Grandmother take the saucer pie and set it aside. And then, somehow, nobody seemed to remember that Susan was at the table at all. She sat there, the lump in her throat growing bigger and bigger and with a strange prickly feeling in the end of her nose, until the tears began to chase one another down her cheeks. And then Susan slipped from her chair and ran upstairs.

On the floor near the door lay innocent Snowball. Susan pushed her to one side with such force that Snowball flew under the bed and struck the wall with a thump. Then Susan threw herself on the bed beside Flip and clasped her in her arms.

First she cried until she couldn't cry any more, and then she whispered the whole story into Flip's ear. "Nobody loves me but you, Flippy," finished Susan with a gasp. Already she felt comforted, for, no matter what happened, Flippy was always on her side.

After a little, she rolled off the bed, and stood looking out of the window into the hot garden below. There was not a breath of air stirring. The leaves of the fruit trees scarcely moved, the sky seemed to swim and dance before her eyes, and the only sound to be heard was the shrill singing of the locusts in the trees.

It was then that Susan said, "mean, mean, mean," and she meant Grandmother, and Grandfather, and every one in the whole round world except Flippy Whiting.

Susan twisted the shade cord and sniffed, and tried to think of all the cross and disagreeable things Grandmother and Grandfather had ever done to her.

But there was something strange about those thoughts. They were as contrary as Susan herself. For all she could remember were the times when Grandmother and Grandfather had been kind and patient and good, and little by little quite a different feeling came over her.

"Grandfather always takes me driving with him when he can," thought she. "And Grandmother made the new dress for Flip; and she brought me a paint-box yesterday from Green Valley."

And suddenly Susan began to cry again.

"But this time it is sorry tears. The other time it was mad ones," thought she to herself, for Susan was quite as sharp as are most little girls to know when she was in the right or in the wrong.

Downstairs she flew, and flung her arms about Grandmother.

"Oh, oh, oh," moaned Susan, burying her face in Grandmother's neck. "Oh, Grandmother, Grandmother." And if she had stood upon the church steps and shouted, "I'm sorry," to the whole village, she couldn't have said it more plainly.

Grandmother understood her quite well, and all she said was:

"I couldn't believe that my Susan would be so rude to me."

"I didn't mean it, I didn't mean it," whispered Susan, and, sealing the peace with a kiss, she went in search of Grandfather.

He sat on the porch, reading his paper, and he must have heard all that she said, for he opened his arms, and without a word she snuggled down upon his lap. With both hands she pulled his face round to hers and placed a kiss upon what she called "my very own spot," none other than the tip of Grandfather's nose.

"Promise you will never let any one else kiss you there," Susan had once begged.

"I promise," Grandfather had answered with a laugh. And no doubt he kept his word.

But now, he put his hand into his baggy coat pocket and pulled out a plump summer squash.

"I thought this would make a nice dolly for you," said he. "I picked it up after dinner in the garden." And with his knife he deftly cut eyes and nose and mouth, and handed over the simpering orange-colored baby to the delighted Susan.

"Now we will go down to the office," said he, "and let Grandmother have a nap this afternoon. I have to see a man on business, but you can play around the schoolhouse while I'm busy."

At the roadside gate they stopped a moment "to catch the breeze," said Grandfather, pulling off his hat and mopping his brow.

A man, whistling a lively tune, came up the road, and surely he felt the heat but little, for he wore a brown velveteen jacket and had knotted about his throat a bright red handkerchief. His face was brown and his soft hat showed dark curling hair underneath the brim.

Grandfather eyed him shrewdly, and, as the man passed the gate, he spoke.

"Sarishan," said Grandfather.

The man stopped short and looked Grandfather straight in the eye.

"Sarishan, rye," answered the man.

Grandfather Whiting laughed and shook his head.

"No, no," said he. "I'm no rye, and 'sarishan' is all the Romany I know. But I wanted to see whether you would answer me. There are not many Romanies to be seen about here nowadays. Are there?"

The man shook his head and moved on. After a pause, he began his whistling again.

"What is it, Grandfather?" asked Susan. "What were you saying? Who is that man?"

"He is a gypsy," answered Grandfather, watching the man out of sight, past the schoolhouse and round the bend of the road. "I thought so when I saw him, so I spoke to him in Romany or gypsy talk. I said, 'Sarishan.' That means, 'good-day.'

I'm surprised he answered me. They generally pretend not to understand."

"Sarishan," repeated Susan. She liked the soft pretty word. "But what did he call you, Grandfather?"

"He called me 'rye.' That means a gentleman. A Romany rye is a gypsy gentleman. Some people like gypsy life, Susan, and know and understand the gypsies better than others do. Sometimes they slip away and live with the gypsies for a time. And this man thought I was one of them because I spoke to him in Romany."

Susan wanted to ask Grandfather what gypsy life was like. But the man Grandfather was to see on business drove up just then, so she slipped across the road to the deserted schoolhouse, and, bringing out her own little broom which she kept under the porch, she proceeded to give the steps and the walk a thorough sweeping.

This housewifely task ended, she seated herself on the steps, for she thought the squash baby needed an afternoon nap. Tied round the handle of the broom was a little blue cloth that Susan used for a duster. It was new and clean, so she fastened it round the neck of the squash baby as a cloak, and so rocked the baby to and fro and hummed a little song.

It was quiet on the schoolhouse steps. The shadows crept silently across the road, so silently that they did not disturb a little head pillowed on the hard boards of the porch.

The flowers and grasses in the neglected yard stirred and rustled in the afternoon breeze, just beginning to spring up, but all they murmured was "Hush! Hush!" The bees hummed and buzzed busily about among the flowers, one inquisitive young fellow, who knew no better, actually lighting on Susan's gay hair-ribbon, as if he thought it a new kind of blossom. But the little mother did not stir, for the very song the bees sang was a lullaby.

So that Susan's nap was long and refreshing, and when at last she woke and stretched her stiff little arms and legs, she discovered that she was hungry.

"You stay here, baby," said she, firmly planting the ever-smiling squash baby upon the steps. "I'll be back in a minute with a cooky for you."

Susan trudged leisurely up Featherbed Lane. Near the end she halted, and, leaning on the garden wall, stared with interest over at the Tallman house.

The sound of crying was plainly to be heard floating out upon the air. The dismal wails grew louder, and then the door opened and Phil's father appeared.

He walked with a determined air to the big lilac bush near the foot of the steps, and, pulling out his pen-knife, carefully selected and cut off a stout little branch.

"It's a switch," thought Susan, terror-stricken. "Oh, me, it's a switch."

At this moment the door was flung open again, and out upon the porch

darted a little figure. Its face was red, its arms were whirling, it was dancing up and down and crying all at once. But, nevertheless, as Susan peered closely, she saw that it was Phil. There was no doubt about that.

His friend on the other side of the fence held her breath at the sight. Oh, how sorry she was for him! She knew just how badly he felt. She, too, would have been dancing in a frenzy if, a little earlier that afternoon, she had seen Grandfather cutting a switch.

But, finally, Phil found his voice. "No, no!" he shrieked; "I'll be good! I'll be good! I'll be good!"

His father turned and looked at him.

"Stop crying," said he.

Phil sobbed and capered about a moment longer, but at last his sobs died away and he stood still.

His father eyed him a moment longer. Then he shut his pen-knife with a snap and dropped the switch in the grass.

At this welcome sight Phil vanished into the house, and his father slowly followed him.

"What a horrid day," thought Susan. "Poor Philly! But I won't tell I saw. I mean I won't tell any one but Grandmother and Grandfather and Flip."

Armed with her cookies, Susan traveled back to the schoolhouse. On the little stone walk she stopped and stared. The schoolhouse steps were bare!

Where was the squash baby? Surely she hadn't walked away by herself. Neither had she rolled off, toppled over by her own weight, for Susan searched carefully in the grass about the steps. She shook the schoolhouse door. It was firmly locked. She peeped in the window. The same familiar scene met her eye: rows of old-fashioned benches, rusty stove, dingy maps upon the wall, tin dipper left upon the window-sill.

To Susan's relief she saw Grandfather's business friend drive away, and she hurried across the road to tell of the mysterious disappearance.

"Too bad," said Grandfather, as hand in hand they walked up to the house. "But I'll make you another baby. Some mischievous boy has passed by and taken it. There is not much travel on this road, though, and you never lost anything before, did you? It's strange."

Over on the Tallman steps sat Phil alone. He was spick and span in a clean starched suit, his hair was brushed to a gloss, and he was turning the leaves of a picture-book in a way that any proper and well-behaved child might imitate. At this moment, whatever may have been true earlier in the day, there was not the slightest suggestion of Naughty Adolphus about little Phil.

But he seemed dispirited, and Grandmother, who had sharp eyes and ears as well as a warm heart, and who had guessed something of Phil's unhappy after-

noon, looked from the drooping little figure on the steps to the red-rimmed eyes of her own Susan.

"Susan," said she briskly, "it's a long while to supper-time. You run over and ask Mrs. Vane to let Philip come back here with you. Tell her I have a little treat for you two. I hope I won't give them bad dreams," Grandmother added to herself, as Susan gladly sped over the garden wall and across the green lawn on her pleasant errand.

Back came the children, hand in hand, already looking brighter, and when they saw the little saucer pie, neatly cut in two, they broke into broad smiles.

"Chew it well," instructed Grandmother, "and when you have finished, be sure you run around the house three times.

"But I believe their pleasure is worth one nightmare," reflected she, "though I don't know that Mrs. Vane would agree with me."

"It's good," announced Phil, his own cheerful self once more, as he joyously ate berry juice with a spoon.

"It's the best pie I ever tasted," said Susan, twisting about in her chair to smile at Grandmother. Never, never again would she be rude to Grandmother; of that she was sure.

"But I do wish," said Susan, looking round at every one, "that I knew who took my squash baby."

CHAPTER V—DOWN AT MISS LIZA'S

"Here is your tin pail, Susan. Try not to lose the cover, child."

"Yes, Grandmother."

"And I've put your slippers in this little bag. Be sure to bring them home again with you."

"Yes, Grandmother."

"And tell Miss Liza she is to start you home at half-past three.

"Tell her I said so. She will have had quite enough of you children by that time, but she is so good-natured she would let you stay till Doomsday if you liked."

And Grandmother, straightening Susan's hat, smiled down into the expectant little face looking up into hers.

"Yes, Grandmother," answered Susan for the last time, and ran off to join Phil, who, also provided with a pail and a pair of bedroom slippers, stood waiting in the lane.

"Isn't this nice?" asked Susan as, clashing their pails cheerfully, they moved briskly along the road. "I do love to go to Miss Liza's. When she lived in your house I used to go over every day, and sometimes when she was baking she would let me help. She had little wee cake pans of a fish, and a leaf, and a star." And Susan smiled at happy memories of Miss Liza's baking-days.

"Will we make cakes to-day, do you think?" inquired Phil, who, invited with Susan to spend the day at Miss Eliza Tallman's, was making his first social call of the season and was not quite sure what was expected of him. For all he knew to the contrary, it was customary to carry a tin pail and bedroom slippers when going visiting for the day.

"I don't believe so," returned Susan doubtfully. "Miss Liza doesn't live alone now. She lives with her niece, Miss Lunette. And Miss Lunette can't bear the tiniest bit of noise. That's why we brought our slippers. We have to put them on the minute we get there, and walk on tiptoe, and just whisper." And Susan's voice sank mysteriously as she related their programme for the day.

Phil looked downcast. The prospect of whispering and walking on tiptoe was not in the least pleasing to him.

"Is Miss Lunette sick?" he inquired soberly.

"Oh, yes," Susan assured him, "she is. I heard Grandmother and Miss Liza talking. No one knows just what is the matter with her, but she must have good things to eat, and some one to wait on her, and not one bit of noise. And I heard Grandmother and Grandfather talking, too," went on the "little pitcher." "Grandmother said, 'Liza's a saint on earth,' and Grandfather said, 'In my opinion, all Miss Lunette needs is a little hard work!' I don't know just what they meant. But, anyway, we are going to fill our pails with currants and raspberries. Miss Liza said so."

Phil brightened for a moment, but his face clouded again and he stopped in the road.

"Can't we shout before we get there, Susan?" he asked plaintively. "I feel just like shouting to-day."

"I do, too," agreed Susan willingly. "Let's shout now where there is no one to stop us." And putting down their bundles so that they might swing their arms as well, the children opened their mouths and shouted until they could shout no more.

On either side of the road lay a dense little wood. The noise of the shouting

woke the echoes and startled the birds who rose in the air with a whirr of wings and then settled down again. There was the crackling of underbrush and the rustle of leaves, but neither of the children saw a cautious little figure, with brown face and tumbled black hair, peering at them from behind a tree. His hungry eyes traveled to their pails and stopped there.

"I'll race you!" shouted Phil suddenly. And he was off, with Susan close behind, their empty pails swinging as they ran.

The little brown figure turned and disappeared among the tree-trunks.

Miss Eliza Tallman stood waiting for her guests on the steps of the white cottage that was separated from the street by an old-fashioned flower garden, now glowing in its prime.

Miss Liza herself was as wholesome and sweet and crisp as the row of pinks that bordered the walk and sent their spicy odors out upon the warm summer air. Miss Liza was round and plump. Her crinkly brown hair, with only a few threads of gray, was drawn into a round little knob at the back of her head. Her eyes, round and blue, looked out pleasantly from behind round gold spectacles. She stood, absently smoothing down her stiffly starched white apron, until she caught sight of the children, and then she waved her hand in greeting.

"I'm glad to see you," she called softly.

And something in the quiet voice made Susan remember to close the gate behind her gently instead of letting it swing shut with a slam.

"Sit right down here on the porch steps and put on your slippers. Miss Lunette feels right well to-day, and she wants you to come up and see her before dinner."

And Miss Liza smiled so warmly at little Phil that he cheered up immediately. Going to see Miss Lunette couldn't be very dreadful if Miss Liza looked so pleasant about it.

Up the steep stairs they toiled softly, and were ushered into a room so darkened that, coming from the glare of the sun outside, it was at first difficult to see anything.

But Phil at length made out a figure, wrapped in a shawl this warm summer day, seated in a cushioned rocking-chair, and felt a cool, slim hand take his own for an instant. He looked timidly into the face above him and saw with a lightened heart that Miss Lunette was not dreadful at all, that she didn't look in the least as he had expected and feared to see her look.

And in the fullness of his heart, little Phil spoke out.

"Why, you are pretty," said he to Miss Lunette.

Miss Lunette's pale, thin face flushed with pleasure, and she laid a hand lightly upon Philip's head.

"I feel so well to-day," said she graciously, "that I want to show you children

some toys that I've been making. Some day I mean to sell them in the city, but it won't do any harm, I suppose, to show them to you beforehand. It is what we call wool-work," added she carefully.

On a table, drawn close to Miss Lunette's chair, stood a group of animals made of worsted. There were yellow chickens standing unsteadily upon their toothpick legs. Lopsided white sheep faced a pair of stout rabbits evidently suffering from the mumps. A dull brown rooster suddenly blossomed out into a gorgeous tail of red and green and purple yarn.

For a grown person it would be difficult to imagine who, in the city, would purchase these strange specimens of natural history, but such a disloyal thought did not occur to the children. They admired the toys to Miss Lunette's complete satisfaction, and they had their reward. For Miss Lunette took from the shelf under the table a book, a home-made book, between whose pasteboard covers had been sewed leaves of stiff white paper.

"As a special treat," said Miss Lunette sweetly to her round-eyed audience, "I am going to show you my book."

She paused for an instant to allow Susan and Phil to feast their eyes upon the book in silence.

"This is the cover," said she at last, "and I made the picture myself."

The picture was that of a rigid little boy, in a paper soldier cap, stiffly blowing upon a tin trumpet. The picture was carefully colored with red and blue crayons.

"Oh, it's pretty," said Susan, in honest admiration. She meant to make a book herself as soon as she reached home.

"What's inside?" asked Philip. He felt sorry for that little boy, who, as long as he lived with Miss Lunette, might never make a noise.

"I think the cover ought to be bright and gay, so that it will attract the children," went on the authoress. "Don't you think so, too?"

Yes, Susan and Phil thought so, too.

"But what's inside?" asked Philip again.

How was that little boy going to play soldier, and never once shout or fire off a gun?

"The name of the book is 'Scripture for Little Ones,'" continued Miss Lunette. "I will read parts of it to you if you like." And opening at page one, she began to read.

A is for Absalom who hung by his hair
From a tree—How painful to be left swinging there.

B is for Baalam—He had a donkey who spoke—

If we heard it to-day we would think it a joke.

C is for Cain—His brother Abel he slew—
He was a murderer—May it never be true of you!

D is for Daniel who, in the lion's den,
Suffered no harm from beasts or from men.

E is for—

But whom E stood for the children never knew, for Miss Liza appeared in the doorway bearing a tray.

"Here is your dinner, Lunette," said she gently. "Children, you creep downstairs now. You don't want to overdo, Lunette," she added, as she placed the invalid's substantial dinner before her. "You've been talking for an hour now."

Downstairs Miss Liza closed the stairway door that led up to Miss Lunette's room.

"Now you can talk out as loud as you like," said she, "and you won't disturb any one. What's the news up at your house, Susan? Have you and Phil found the buried ten cents yet?"

No, Susan had forgotten all about it.

So, as she stepped about putting their dinner on the table, Miss Liza told Phil the story of the buried ten cents.

"You know, Phil," said she, "you are living in my house,—the house I was born and brought up in. And one day, when I was a little girl eight years old, my uncle, who had a farm a mile or so away, drove past our house and saw me in the road.

"'Here's ten cents,' said he. 'Five for you and five for Jim.' Jim was my brother. Now I was a selfish little thing," said Miss Liza, shaking her head, "and what did I do but dig a hole under the kitchen window and put the ten cents in it. Some day, when Jim was out of the way, I meant to dig it up and spend it all on myself. But do you know, I never have found that money from that day to this. I dug, and Jim dug, and Susan here has dug, and I suppose you will try now. If you find it, be sure you let me know."

"I will find it," said Phil, excited. "I will. You see."

Miss Liza nodded wisely.

"That is what Susan thought," she answered. "Now draw up to the table. I hope you are hungry." And Miss Liza smiled hospitably round at her guests.

They were hungry. The good dinner disappeared from their plates like magic, but the crowning touch came when the little cakes shaped like fish and

leaves and stars appeared upon the table.

"I told Phil about them," Susan repeated over and over; "I told him, I told him."

After dinner, Susan and Phil went into the garden to fill their pails with currants and raspberries. It must be admitted that they picked more raspberries than currants, and that they put almost as many berries into their mouths as into their pails.

They were hard at work when Miss Liza joined them.

"It's half-past three," said she, shading her eyes with her hands and looking up at the sky. "And if your Grandmother meant what she said, you ought to start for home. But what I'm thinking of is the weather. It's clear enough overhead, but low down there are black clouds that look like a shower to me. I don't know whether you ought to set out or not."

The clouds looked very far away to the children, and, now that their pails were almost full, it seemed a pity not to stay a little longer.

But Miss Liza took one more look round at the sky and made up her mind once for all.

"You must go right along," she decided, "and hurry, too. I shan't have an easy moment till I think you are safe at home. Here are your hats and slippers. Miss Lunette is napping, now, so I will say good-bye for you. Hurry right along, children, and don't stop to play by the way."

And all in a twinkling Susan and Phil found themselves walking down the village street, with Miss Liza at the gate, waving good-bye with one hand and motioning them along with the other.

The sun was shining as they left the village and turned into the country road that led past home, but there were low mutterings and rumblings and Phil stopped to listen.

"There's a wagon on the bridge," said he. "Maybe they will give us a ride."

"It's thunder," returned Susan, more weather-wise than he. "Listen. It's getting dark, too. I wish a wagon would come along."

But there was no sound of wheels; only rumblings of thunder growing ever louder, the rustle of leaves in the rising wind, and the call of the birds to one another as they hastened to shelter from the coming storm.

"It's blue sky overhead, anyway," said Susan. "Let's run."

"It's raining," announced Phil, heavily burdened with slippers and pail. "I hear it on the leaves. I can't run. Let's sit down under a tree."

"No, no!" exclaimed Susan, seizing his hand. "Come on! It's blue sky overhead. I want to get home to Grandmother. I don't like it in the woods in the rain. Come on! Do hurry—Run!"

The tiny patch of blue sky upon which Susan had pinned her faith had been

rapidly growing smaller. Now it was altogether out of sight. There was a sharp flash of lightning, a loud clap of thunder, and down came the rain like the bursting of a waterspout.

"Oh, run, Philly, run!" called Susan, darting to the side of the road. "Come here with me under the trees."

A flash of lightning and long roll of thunder came just at that moment, and put to flight all Phil's small stock of courage. He was frightened and tired, and he could endure no more. He dropped his pail of precious berries to the ground, he let fall his slippers, and, standing in the downpour, he lifted up his voice and wept.

"Mamma, Mamma!" wailed Phil. "I want Mamma!"

Poor Susan was distracted. Her lip trembled and her eyes filled with tears, but she bravely ran out into the road again and caught Phil by the arm.

"Come, Philly, come," entreated Susan.

But Phil, bewildered by the dazzling flashes of light and peals of thunder, was beside himself with fear. He jerked his arm away and ran screaming up the road, splashing through puddles as he went.

"Oh, Philly! Oh, Grandfather! Oh, Grandfather!" wailed Susan. She felt that the end of the world had come.

But deliverance was at hand.

Out of the woods appeared a man and a boy. The man easily overtook Phil and lifted him in his arms.

"Don't be afraid, missy," called he to Susan above Phil's screams. "Come along with me."

The boy had gathered up the scattered bundles, and he now grasped Susan's hand, and so, dripping with rain, the little party vanished into the shelter of the woods.

CHAPTER VI—THE GYPSIES

Susan sneezed twice, coughed, and looked about her.

She stood in a tent, round like a circus tent, and the air was heavy with smoke from a fire smouldering on the ground. There were no doors or windows

in the tent, and but little light entered on this dark afternoon through a half-dozen rents in the roof.

But Susan made out in the gloom not only the man and boy who had brought her there, but a plump, dark woman, with gold hoops in her ears, who was gently wiping the rain from Phil's face, three or four ragged children dressed in bright reds and yellows, staring intently at her with big black eyes, and a dog or two, discreetly lurking in the dim background.

Susan sneezed again, and the woman turned from Phil and spoke.

"It's the smoke, dearie," said she kindly. "You'll be used to it in a moment. Tell your little brother not to be afraid. He is among friends. We wouldn't hurt a hair of your heads. Tell him that."

"I want to go home," said Phil, with under lip thrust out. "I want to go home."

"And so you shall," said the woman briskly, "as soon as it stops raining a bit, and my man can find out where you live."

"Straight up the hill," said Susan quickly. She, too, was eager to be at home. "I saw you at my gate," she added shyly, to the man. "My grandfather said 'Sarishan' to you."

Susan knew the brown velveteen coat, though the red tie was hidden under the upturned collar.

The man looked at her a moment, and then he smiled.

"True enough," said he. "I remember. I'll take you home. I'll harness the 'gry' and take them in the van," said he to his wife. "It's still raining hard. They shall know that the gypsies are good to deal with, and that the worst of them is not James Lee."

And, whistling his gay little tune, Mr. James Lee lifted the tent flap and went out again into the rain which still pattered musically on the canvas roof.

Susan began to enjoy herself. Now that she knew she was going home shortly, she looked about her with fresh pleasure.

"It would be fun to live in a tent," she thought,—"so different from home. No beds, no chairs, no table. The gypsies must eat sitting on the ground, and sleep, perhaps, on that great heap in the corner."

That it was not very clean, and was very, very crowded, smoky and dark did not enter Susan's mind.

She smiled at the children still staring silently at her. Besides the big boy who, with back turned, seemed busy in the corner, there were three little girls, two of whom, with coarse black hair and bold eyes, smiled back at Susan and then fell to giggling and poking one another. One of them darted forward and jerked at Susan's scarlet hair-ribbon. The other stole slyly behind her and twitched her dress. They were mischievous, trixy children, and Susan felt uneasy with them. She was relieved when their mother, seeing the rough play, exclaimed, "Clear out,

you young ones," and drove them away.

The third little girl, who was scarcely more than a baby, remained in her place, staring solemnly at Susan. She did not look like the other children; indeed, she did not look like a gypsy at all. She was a slender little creature with pale brown hair, large gray eyes, and a tiny hooked nose that gave a strange air of determination to her baby face. She held something behind her back, and suddenly she stepped forward and showed it to Susan.

It was the lost squash baby!

Susan knew it instantly. It had even the bit of blue rag tied about its neck.

"Why, it's my squash baby!" said she, in surprise.

"Yours, is it?" said Mrs. Lee, coming forward. "My man picked it up in the road and gave it to Gentilla. Give it back, Gentilla. The little miss wants it."

"No, no, I don't want it," said Susan hastily. "Let her keep it. Is her name Gentilla? She is a nice little girl."

"Gentilla Lee, a good gypsy name," returned Mrs. Lee. "She is an orphan. She is my husband's brother's child. You might think I had enough to do with three children of my own. But no, I must have one more." And Mrs. Lee lifted the tent flap and moodily looked out into the still falling rain.

Susan smiled at Gentilla, who looked soberly back and then moved closer to Susan's side and began stroking the visitor's dress with a tiny hand that was far from clean. Suddenly she slipped her hand in Susan's, and, swinging round on it, smiled up into her face.

It seemed a good beginning of a friendship, and Susan was sorry when Mrs. Lee turned round in the doorway and said:

"Here comes my man with the van. You will be home in no time now."

Through the woods stepped Mr. James Lee leading a bony gray horse, which was drawing a gypsy van, gay with bright red and green and black paint. He opened the door in the back of the van and helped the children in.

"My pail," said Phil, clutching his slippers. "I've lost my pail."

Mrs. Lee disappeared into the tent, and came out in a moment with Phil's pail—empty! No wonder the big boy, busy eating Phil's berries, had turned his back in the corner of the tent.

"Don't cry, Phil. You shall have half my berries. Don't cry. We're going home." And Susan waved vigorous good-byes to Mrs. Lee and Gentilla, held back by her aunt from following Susan into the van.

Mr. Lee carefully led his horse through the woods to the muddy road, and then, sitting up in front, drove his old "gry" up the hill toward Featherbed Lane.

In the meantime Susan and Phil were looking round the van in surprise and delight.

"It's like a little playhouse," said Susan, squeezing Phil's hand. "Oh, I wish I

lived in a gypsy van all the time."

Opposite the door, in the very front of the van, were two beds, one above the other like berths on a ship, and broad enough, each one, to hold three or four gypsy children at once, if need be, and as, in fact, they very often did. There was a little cookstove, whose pipe wandered out of the side of the van in a most unusual way. And alongside the stove was a table, hanging by hinges from the wall. A high chest of drawers and two chairs completed the furniture of the van, which looked very much like a state-room and felt somewhat like one, too, as it swayed over the hillocks and ruts in the road.

Up Featherbed Lane bounced the van, and there on the porch stood Grandmother and Miss Liza, both with white cheeks and anxious faces, while Grandfather came hurrying from the barn where he had been harnessing old Nero with a speed that quite upset the dignity of that staid Roman-nosed beast.

"Where were you, children?" cried Miss Liza in greeting, twisting the corner of her apron as she spoke. "I ran up here in all that downpour, and I didn't see a sign of you on the way."

"My berries are gone," called Phil. "The big boy ate them. And I was afraid. And we were inside a tent."

"They are gypsies," said Susan in a low voice to Grandmother, who was carefully feeling her all over. "They live in a tent. And, inside, that van is just like a doll's house. Their name is Lee. I wish I lived in a van; it's better than a tent, I think. And they have the nicest little girl you ever saw. Her name is Gentilla Lee. She likes me, I know she does, Grandmother. I want to go see her again."

"You are wet in spots, child, and damp all over," was all Grandmother replied. "Come straight in the house and let me put dry clothes on you."

Grandfather and the gypsy had been talking together all this time, and now Grandfather put something into Mr. James Lee's hand that made his white teeth gleam in a smile, and caused him to drive first to the store in the village before returning to his hungry family in their tent in the woods.

Then Phil was escorted home; Miss Liza was driven back to Miss Lunette, who might be worried sick by her absence, Miss Liza thought, but who proved to have slept soundly through the storm; and Susan, her tongue wagging, was put into a hot bath and dressed in dry clothes from head to foot before Grandfather returned.

"I want to go back and see the gypsies," Susan teased the next day. "I want to see Gentilla. Please, Grandfather, take me to see the gypsies."

So Grandmother baked a cake in her largest tin, and at the village store Grandfather and Susan purchased several yards of bright red hair-ribbon. With these offerings they made their way to the gypsy tent, and received a hospitable welcome.

The van, with all its conveniences, was willingly displayed, and Grandfather was invited to test with his hand the softness of the beds, the like of which, Mrs. Lee declared, was not to be found in kings' palaces. Privately, Grandfather believed this to be true, but, of course, he didn't say it aloud.

To-day, with the sun shining, and the dogs gnawing a bone at a safe distance in the grass, the tent seemed to Susan even more attractive than before. She thought with scorn of her own white little room at home, and wished with all her heart that she had been born a gypsy child. Even the two bold little girls seemed pleasanter, and indeed, delighted with their new hair-ribbons and awed by Grandfather's presence, they were more quiet and well-behaved, at least during Susan's call.

The big boy silently devoured his share of Grandmother's cake, and then, with a hungry look still gleaming in his eyes, gazed so longingly at the crumbs remaining that Grandfather took pity upon him. With a turn of his hand he flipped a piece of money at the lad so that, with sure aim, he struck the boy's bare foot.

"Go buy something to eat with it," commanded Grandfather.

Pulling at his tangled hair in a rough bow of thanks, the boy, waiting for no second bidding, vanished among the trees and was seen no more by his family that afternoon.

Mr. James Lee entertained Grandfather as one gentleman should another. He had many stories of adventure to tell, and he even brought out his fiddle from under the beds and played several lively gypsy tunes.

"Shall I tell the little miss's fortune?" asked Mrs. Lee, with a half-sly look, and she laughed outright when Grandfather shook his head with a smile.

"I believe in your fortune-telling just about as much as you do," he answered. "My granddaughter seems perfectly happy this moment. She doesn't need any better fortune than she has."

Nor did she, for she and Gentilla, still carrying the squash baby, had become good friends and were enjoying their play together equally well. They walked off, hand in hand, Susan helping Gentilla over the rough places and mothering her to her heart's delight. She washed her new baby's face and hands in the brook and dried them upon her own handkerchief. She told her about Flip, and Snowball, and Snuff, to which Gentilla listened with a roll of her big gray eyes. She, herself, didn't talk very much, but Susan quite made up for this lack, and had begun to teach her "Two little blackbirds sat upon a hill," when she heard Grandfather calling and knew that she must go.

"I don't want to leave Gentilla," said Susan, as she joined the group before the tent. "Do you suppose I can come and play with her to-morrow?" "Perhaps Mrs. Lee will let Gentilla come and play with you," answered Mr. Whiting, who thought Susan better off at home than in the gypsy camp.

So it was settled that Mr. James Lee would bring Gentilla to-morrow to spend the day, and Susan went home with a happy heart, chattering to Grandfather about her new-found friends.

"Wouldn't you like to be a gypsy, Grandfather?" asked she. "Wouldn't you like to live in a tent? Why isn't everybody a gypsy? It's such a nice way to live."

"Well, Susan, most people think it better to stay in one place instead of wandering over the face of the earth," answered Grandfather. "And among other things, they want their children to go to school and to church, too."

"I don't care so much about going to school," said Susan, honestly. "I know I would like to live in a tent and ride around in that van."

"It seems pleasant enough now, while it is warm weather," admitted Grandfather. "But what about cold, and rain, and snow, and not any too much to eat?"

"They were hungry, weren't they?" pondered Susan. "How they did like Grandmother's cake!"

That night at supper Susan looked round the pleasant, well-lighted room, with its table spread with good things to eat. She thought of the tent in the woods, the trees standing tall and black about it, and the near-by brook gurgling over its stones without a pause. It seemed dark and dreary and lonely, and with a little shudder Susan bent down and whispered to Snuff:

"I wouldn't have us be gypsies, Snuff, for anything in the world."

And when she went to bed, she astonished Grandmother by saying in the midst of her prayers:

"Thank you, God, for not making Grandmother a gypsy, because then I wouldn't have any apple sauce for my supper."

CHAPTER VII—IN THE SCHOOLHOUSE

Susan and Gentilla were at play in the garden, walking Indian fashion up one path and down the other between the rows of summer vegetables. The little girls held their arms outstretched to keep their balance, and, now and then, with shrill little screams, one or the other would almost, but not quite, topple over.

Occasionally Gentilla, unsteady on her feet, made a misstep among the beets and peas, and once she sat down upon a cabbage. But, as she was as light as a feather, it certainly did the cabbage no harm, and perhaps a great deal of good for all we know to the contrary.

"Gentilla," said Susan, struck with a happy thought, "let's go play on the schoolhouse steps."

"Yes, let's," said Gentilla agreeably. She did not know where the schoolhouse steps were, but she would have gone as willingly to the North Pole if Susan had suggested it.

She and Susan had become warm friends. Gentilla spent almost every day at the house on Featherbed Lane, and Grandmother and Grandfather and even Miss Liza had grown fond of the little gypsy girl because of her happy disposition and loving little ways. Gentilla was not a great talker, but she made smiles and a dimple and funny little bobs of her head take the place of speech. She liked to steal up behind you and place a kiss as soft as thistledown in the palm of your hand. She rubbed gently up against one as a little kitten would, and by her pats and what Susan called "smoothings" told you how much she loved you without a single word.

"She is a good child," said Grandmother. "I can hardly believe that she is a real gypsy child. She doesn't seem like one to me."

"She does wind herself round your heart," confided Miss Liza. "If I lived alone I would almost think of adopting her, though I don't know whether her people would be willing to part with her."

"Mr. Whiting says they are a little jealous because we do so much for Gentilla, and not for their own little girls. He thinks we haven't been very wise," answered Mrs. Whiting. "And now that you have made Gentilla these aprons, I don't know what they will say."

From the shady back porch, where Grandmother and Miss Liza sat rocking and sewing together, it looked as if two Susans, one large and one small, were walking down the path toward them. For Gentilla wore, fitted to her small person, a dress Susan had outgrown, and on her feet a pair of Susan's shoes, the toes well stuffed with cotton.

"Grandmother, we are going to play," called Susan. "And I want to whisper in your ear."

"Can't you say it out loud?" inquired Grandmother mildly. "It isn't polite to whisper, Susan."

"I only wanted to ask if I might pack a lunch in my little basket for us," said Susan. "It isn't a secret. I just as lief have Miss Liza hear."

Susan reappeared in a moment, basket in hand, carrying Snowball and Flip.

"Let me see what you took, Susan," said Grandmother.

In the basket were two molasses peppermints and two lumps of sugar. "Just enough for Gentilla and me," said Susan contentedly. "Phil has gone to Green Valley with his mother."

Down the lane they started, Gentilla carrying Snowball, Susan with Flip and the basket of lunch.

"There is no use looking in there to-day," announced Susan, waving her hand toward the office. "Grandfather has gone fishing, and Snuff has gone with him. This is good weather for fishing. Grandfather said so, and he knows everything."

"Everything," echoed Gentilla loyally.

"Yes, he does," Susan chattered on. "When I was little, I used to wonder why he wasn't a king. There are always plenty of kings in fairy stories, but there don't seem to be any round here. Did you ever see a king?"

Gentilla shook her head solemnly, but Susan was not looking at her.

"Gentilla," said Susan, staring at the schoolhouse door, "it's open!"

Never before had Susan seen the schoolhouse door unlocked. Many times had she shaken it and rattled the knob, and all of no avail. But now the door actually stood ajar, and, with a push that sent it wide open, Susan, followed by Gentilla, stepped over the threshold.

The air in the schoolroom was close and warm, and dust lay thick upon the floor and danced in the beams of sunlight that filtered through the grimy window-panes.

Susan walked about, surveying the battered desks covered with scratches and ink-spots and ornamented with initials cut into the wood. The door of the rusty stove stood open, and within lay a heap of torn papers. The faded maps were not interesting, and Susan began to think the schoolroom more attractive when peeped at from the porch than when actually within it.

"Let's go outside," said she to Gentilla, who had followed her about like Mary's lamb. "Then we'll sit down and eat our lunch." The lunch basket, guarded by Flip and Snowball, had been left on the porch steps.

Susan turned the knob of the schoolhouse door, which had swung shut behind them, and pulled. The door wouldn't open. Susan tugged until she grew red in the face.

"You try, Gentilla," said she.

Gentilla obligingly gave a pull, and toppled over backward upon the floor.

"Don't cry," said Susan, helping her to her feet. "We will just climb out of the window."

But the windows, swollen and stiff, were no more accommodating than the door.

Susan climbed up on the window-sill, and, covered with dust and dirt, pushed and pulled until she was quite out of breath.

"I can't," she gasped. "I can't open it. What shall we do?"

Gentilla's face puckered up at sight of Susan's distress. She ran back to the door and beat upon it with her soft little fists.

"You open, you open," called Gentilla, in a pitiful little pipe that would have moved a heart of stone.

Susan wanted to cry. There was a big lump in her throat, and it was only vigorous winking and blinking that kept the tears from falling down her cheeks.

But Susan was repeating to herself something she had overheard Grandmother say to Miss Liza that very afternoon.

"Susan is a real little mother to Gentilla," Grandmother had said.

And, at the time, Susan had thought, "If Gentilla ever falls into the fire or tumbles down the well, I must be the one to pull her out."

And she had almost hoped that something of the kind might happen, so that she might show how brave she was, and how devoted to her little friend.

Surely now the time had come. Perhaps they would have to stay forever in the schoolhouse. Without anything to eat they would grow thinner and thinner and thinner until there would be nothing left of them at all. At this doleful thought, one tear rolled down Susan's nose and splashed on the dusty boards. But only one! For she swallowed hard, gave herself a little shake, and then took Gentilla by the hand.

"Come," said she, drawing her gently away from the door. "We will stay by the window, and when anybody goes by, we will knock and shout and call, and some one will let us out, I know."

So the two little girls stationed themselves by the front window and looked longingly out at the sunny road, the dancing leaves, and oh, cruelest of all, the lunch basket on the porch steps, still guarded by the faithful Flip and Snowball.

Susan, her face streaked with dirt, polished off the window-glass as best she could with her pocket handkerchief.

"Grandmother will find us," said she hopefully. "Or else Grandfather will. Don't you be afraid, Gentilla."

But in her heart she thought:

"Grandfather has gone fishing, and perhaps he won't be home till black night. And I didn't tell Grandmother where we were going; I know I didn't tell her where we were going."

These sad thoughts were interrupted by the welcome sound of wheels.

"Knock and scream, knock and scream!" called Susan excitedly.

And they fell to work with a will, Susan redoubling her efforts when she saw that it was Mr. Drew, hastening home behind little brown Molly.

But the *clip*, *clap*, *clip*, *clap*, of Molly's hoofs drowned all the noise they made, and Mr. Drew, with not a glance toward the schoolhouse, drove out of sight.

Susan looked blankly at Gentilla.

"Oh, what a long time we've been here," said she forlornly. "It must be nearly night."

"Nearly night," echoed Gentilla.

She sat down on the floor with her back against the wall, leaving Susan alone on guard. She shut her eyes, her head nodded once or twice, and when Susan next glanced at her she lay on the floor sound asleep.

"Oh, Gentilla, wake up! I'm afraid to stay here alone. Wake up!" began poor Susan, who at that moment would have welcomed the company of even a fly buzzing on the window-pane. But the thought of Grandmother's speech silenced her.

"I won't wake her up, and I won't cry either," thought she. And pressing her face against the window, she bravely watched the empty road for a five minutes that actually seemed to her two hours long.

All kinds of dreadful thoughts began to come to Susan's mind. Were there bears in the woods, and at nightfall would they come lumbering out, and, pushing the door open, squeeze her and Gentilla to death in a mighty bear hug? What if Grandfather had made a mistake and the Indians had not all gone away years ago! Suppose they should carry her off and stain her brown with berry juice, like the little girl in her story book, so that, even if Grandfather should see her, he would never know that it was his black-eyed Susan, but would think she was a real true little Indian girl.

Susan gave a start of horror and almost screamed out loud. Up the road this moment there came prowling a big dark animal.

"Gentilla, Gentilla, here's a bear!" called Susan in a frenzy. "Wake up and help me! Here's a bear! Oh! Oh! He's coming after us! Gentilla! Gentilla!—Why, it's Snuffy! Snuffy! Snuffy! save me!"

And Susan's cries of fright changed into those of joy and hope as soon as she saw that the great brown bear was none other than shaggy, comfortable, homelike Snuff.

Snuffy's bright eyes caught sight of his familiars, Snowball and Flip, seated in lonely state upon the schoolhouse steps. The little basket, which, in days gone by, had often held goodies, as he well knew, excited his curiosity. Up the steps tripped Master Snuff to sniff delicately at the refreshments, and then, to the joy of the prisoners, he saw their faces and heard their knocks and calls.

He barked furiously, and leaped up at the window. He ran to the door, scratching and whining to be let in, then back to the window where he echoed their cries for help by barkings so frantic that Grandfather, trudging leisurely along with his string of fish, wondered what Snuff had cornered on the old school porch.

Snuff was wise enough to know that something was wrong, and that Grandfather was needed to set it right.

Susan held her breath for fear he was leaving them to their fate as he galloped down the walk, but it was only to circle round Grandfather and back again to the steps, where he halted, waiting for his master to join him.

"You rascal," called Grandfather. "I suppose you think I ought to carry those dolls up to the house for Susan. Come along with me, sir."

But when Snuff recommenced barking and leaping at the window, Grandfather Whiting followed him up the walk, and a second later the treacherous door was flung open and Susan was in his arms.

"My own Susan, what is it? What are you doing in here?" asked Grandfather tenderly, as a very dirty little girl clasped him tight, and sent a hot shower of tears down the back of his neck.

"The door wouldn't open, and I didn't wake her up, and I was afraid of bears and Indians," sobbed Susan. "But I knew you'd come, I knew you'd come! And Snuff shall have all the lunch, every bit, because he saved us."

And breathing hard, and winking fast, and holding tight to Grandfather's hand, Susan gladly rewarded Snuff, who devoured his treat in two bites, and then, waving his tail jauntily, ran on ahead to prepare Grandmother for their coming.

Halfway up the lane, the party met Miss Liza, homeward bound.

"Let me take Gentilla," said she, when she had heard the story. "I'll leave her at the camp. She is too little to understand, but Susan has had quite a fright. They weren't gone from home an hour, though," she added, "but I suppose it seemed long to them."

Of course it did. Susan could never be made to believe that she and Gentilla had not been imprisoned in the schoolhouse for hours and hours, perhaps half a day.

When she reached home, she enjoyed telling the story over and over. Grandmother was sympathetic, and gave Susan a lecture upon going into strange places and shutting the door behind her. Grandfather was concerned with the fact that the door was open at all, and wanted to know who had been tampering with town property.

Phil was the most satisfactory audience of all, for he bitterly regretted having missed the adventure, and listened again and again to Susan's account of it with undiminished interest. She was able to brag and boast to him as she could to no one else, and before they separated for the night neither one was quite sure whether or not real bears and Indians had come out of the woods and been driven away by Susan single-handed.

"We'll play about it," said Phil, rising slowly from the steps as he heard his mother for the third time call him to come home. "We'll take turns being bears

and Indians. We can play in my woodshed and we'll play it the first thing—"

"Phil!" came his father's voice.

Phil skipped down the path toward home with the speed of a grasshopper.

"To-morrow!" he called back as he hopped over the stone wall.

Something so exciting was to happen "to-morrow" that, for the time being, this adventure was to be cast in the shade. But Susan went to bed that night feeling quite a heroine, and knowing there was no one in the world Phil envied so much as herself.

CHAPTER VIII—SUSAN'S PRESENT

The next morning early, before breakfast, Susan ran out on the front porch to view the new day. Grandfather had suggested that she go look for "fairy tablecloths" in the grass, but Susan more than half suspected that he wanted her out of the way while he finished shaving. She couldn't help whisking about the room and it did make his hand shake.

Susan watched two rosy little clouds grow fainter and fainter in the pale blue morning sky, and then disappear. She leaned over the porch railing and stared down into the bed of gay portulaca that Grandmother tended with such care both night and morning.

"Grandmother's flowers," thought she, smiling at the bright little cups, all wet with dew. "They are awake and I am awake. I guess everybody is awake now. But where is Snuff? He's always the first one up."

Susan turned to go in search of her playmate when a flutter of white caught her eye. On one of the porch posts a slip of paper had been fastened with a common white pin. In a twinkling Susan was on the rail and down again, paper in hand.

"Grandfather, Grandfather, here's a letter," she called, and, running through the house, she gave the paper to Grandfather, just settling himself at the breakfast table.

"Hum," said Mr. Whiting, when he had read the slip and studied it backward and forward. "This is a strange thing. It's for you, Susan. Look at this, Grandmother."

On a jagged slip of wrapping-paper, printed in uneven letters that slanted downhill, were the words:

"A pressent for the little miss on the school-house steps."

"A present for me?" said Susan, delighted, as Grandfather read it aloud. "I'll go straight down and get it. Shall I?"

"No, no. Eat your breakfast first," answered Grandfather, who was not nearly so pleased at the idea of a present as Susan thought he ought to be.

In fact, over Susan's head, he and Grandmother exchanged glances which seemed to say they did not altogether understand what had happened.

But Susan saw nothing of this, and, breakfast over, she and Grandfather started at once down the lane to see what her mysterious present might be.

"Grandfather, where is Snuff?" asked Susan. "I haven't seen him this morning."

"No more have I," answered Grandfather.

He whistled again and again, and Susan called, but no Snuff appeared in answer to these familiar signals.

On the school porch lay a dark bundle. It was a large bundle, and it moved slightly from side to side. As they drew nearer they heard a wail, and Susan immediately recognized the cry.

"It's Gentilla," she called out. "It's Gentilla crying."

Yes, it was Gentilla, so securely wrapped in a big gray shawl that had been wound tightly about her and pinned in place that she could move neither hands nor feet, and could only rock herself from side to side as she lay on the hard boards of the porch floor.

Grandfather and Susan helped her out of the blanket, and Gentilla tried to tell her story, but all she could say was:

"All gone away,—riding."

She rolled her big gray eyes and waved her tiny hand, and that was the best that she could do to explain her presence there so early in the morning.

There was a strange look on Grandfather's face, and he thrust his hands in his pockets and pursed up his mouth as if to whistle as he stared at the little schoolhouse. For from every window the panes of glass had been neatly removed, and a glance within showed that the old stove had disappeared also.

"You take Gentilla up to the house, Susan," said he. "I'm going down the road a ways."

"Yes, I will," said Susan. "But, Grandfather, where is my present?"

"Perhaps Gentilla is the present," called back Mr. Whiting, already striding

down the hill.

And half an hour later when he returned to the house, Grandfather sank into a chair, put the tips of his fingers together, and began to laugh.

"Do tell me what it is all about," said Grandmother, coming out on the porch, duster in hand. "The children are over at Mrs. Vane's, and they came up here with such a story that I don't know what to think:—Gentilla wrapped in a shawl, and panes of glass gone, and I don't know what all."

Grandfather nodded in agreement as she spoke.

"Yes, sir," said he. "They told the truth. The glass is gone and the stove is gone from the schoolhouse, and what is more, the gypsies themselves have gone from the grove. They have cleared out bag and baggage, and have left Gentilla to us."

"Do you mean to tell me that they have deserted that child?" demanded Grandmother. "What kind of people are they, anyway, to do such a thing as that?"

"Gypsies," answered Grandfather tersely. "She wasn't their own child, you know. And they were always jealous of the way we treated her. I suppose they argued that, if we were so fond of her, we would be glad of the chance to take care of her. I've telephoned, so that people will be on the lookout for them, but the chances are we shall never hear of them again."

"I wouldn't want Gentilla to go back to them after the way they have treated her," said Grandmother indignantly.

"No, except that she is one of them, after all," answered Mr. Whiting. "Well, we will keep the little girl for a time. We needn't be in any great hurry to decide what to do. At any rate, Susan will enjoy a visit from her."

And that Susan proceeded to do at once. She and Phil and Gentilla spent a long and happy day together.

But that night, with Gentilla tucked snugly in the big spare-room bed across the hall, Susan was so excited she couldn't sleep. She twisted and turned and tossed, and at last pattered downstairs for a drink of water.

In the kitchen, to her surprise, she found Grandfather feeding Snuff, who had been missing all day. Snuff ate his good supper as if he were starving. He was covered with mud, an old rope was tied round his neck, and he was so stiff and lame he could scarcely hobble.

Susan waited until Grandfather had seen Snuff safely at rest upon a comfortable bed of straw in the barn. Then upstairs they went together, and Grandfather lay down on the outside of Susan's bed beside her and took her hand in his.

"Where do you think Snuff was all day, Grandfather?" began Susan. "I wish he could talk and tell us."

"So do I," said Grandfather heartily, "Did I ever tell you about a dog I had when I was a little boy—"

"Yes, you did," interrupted Susan. "Thank you, Grandfather, but I know all about him. His name was Nick and he was black all over with not a white spot anywhere. Grandfather, do you think Mr. James Lee took the stove from the schoolhouse?"

"I think he did," answered Grandfather briefly.

"And the glass out of the windows?"

"And the glass out of the windows."

"What will he do with them?"

"Sell them, I think," said Grandfather.

"But they didn't belong to him?" questioned Susan.

"No; they belonged to the town."

"Then he stole!" exclaimed Susan, pulling her hand from Grandfather's so that she might shake an accusing finger in his face.

"It looks that way," admitted Mr. Whiting.

"But you wouldn't steal."

"I hope not," returned Grandfather. "But you must remember, Susan, that the gypsies don't go to school or to church, and so they don't know the difference between right and wrong as well as the people who do."

"They ought to go," said Susan morally. "I go. Everybody ought to go. I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to teach Gentilla Bible stories right away to-morrow. How long will she stay here? Forever?"

"No, not forever. I don't know how long. Now you must go to sleep, or Grandmother will be up here after us."

"I will," promised Susan drowsily. "But, you know, Grandfather, I think they took Snuffy, too, and that is where he was all day. Don't you?"

Grandfather nodded in the darkness. He had been thinking the same thought, but he tiptoed out of the room without another word, and a moment later Susan fell asleep.

Early the next morning she began to train Gentilla. She made her say "thank you," and "please," and "excuse me," until the poor little visitor was so bewildered that she couldn't answer the simplest question. She forced her to listen to Bible stories which she didn't know very well herself, so poky and long-drawn-out that, if Gentilla hadn't had a happy way of falling into little cat-naps whenever the story was too dull to bear, I don't know what would have become of her.

In her own behavior Susan was so moral and proper, and so unlike her own lovable little self, that Grandmother, though she didn't say a word, couldn't help thinking, "If this keeps up, I shall have to go away on a visit. Only I know it won't last."

And it didn't last. It was too unnatural. Of course it didn't last.

After dinner Grandmother asked Susan to go to the store for two spools of

black thread.

"Your Grandfather has torn the pocket in his coat," said she. "Gentilla will wait with me until you come back, for she walks slowly and I am in a hurry."

"Yes, Grandmother," said Susan, primly, hoping they were admiring her manners.

She walked quickly, and was back in a short time with two spools of *white* thread.

"But I told you *black*," said Grandmother. "I can't mend your Grandfather's coat with white thread. I will keep these spools, but you will have to go back for black ones. Remember what I want it for, and then you won't make another mistake."

Gentilla, really enjoying herself alone with Grandmother, sat on the shady porch, comfortably holding Flip.

The sun was hot, and the road was dusty, and it is not pleasant when one is trying to be an example to be told that one has made a mistake. Susan felt aggrieved.

"You said white spools, Grandmother," she answered bluntly. "I know you said white."

Now this was not at all like Susan (perhaps the strain of being an example was beginning to tell) and Mrs. Whiting stared at her in surprise.

"Do you mean to be saucy, Susan?" she asked, after a pause. "Go on your errand at once, without another word."

Susan turned on her heel and swallowed hard. She wanted to scream, or throw something at somebody, but she didn't dare do anything but walk slowly down the lane on her errand.

When she returned, Grandmother took the spools and went into the house. Gentilla, still cuddling Flip, looked up with a smile, but she received a black look in return.

"You can't hold Flip," said Susan, glowering at her. "You may have Snowball, but Flip is mine." And she roughly seized Flippy to pull her out of Gentilla's arms.

But Gentilla was not a gypsy child for nothing. If Susan could pull and slap, she could scratch and kick. So when Grandmother, at sounds of the scuffle, looked out of the window, she saw the model teacher and her pupil engaged in a hand-to-hand battle, with innocent Flip nearly torn in two between them.

"Susan Whiting!" called Grandmother.

And at the sound of her voice, with a mighty push that sent Gentilla backward upon the floor, Susan wrenched Flip from her grasp, and turned and faced the window.

"Put down your doll," commanded Grandmother. "Now, go upstairs to your room and wait there for me."

It was a miserable Susan whom Grandmother joined a few moments later. Without a word, Mrs. Whiting washed the hot face and hands, and helped Susan make ready for bed.

Downstairs she put Gentilla into the hammock, she herself lay down on the couch, and the afternoon quiet was unbroken as they all refreshed themselves with a long nap.

When Susan woke, and saw Grandmother standing by her bedside, she stretched out her arms and laid her penitent head upon Grandmother's soft shoulder.

"I don't know what did it," said Susan at last, when she had whispered for several moments in Grandmother's ear. "I meant to be good. I was trying so hard." And Susan pensively put out her tongue and caught a tear rolling slowly down her cheek.

"Well, Susan, take my advice," said Grandmother sensibly, "and don't try to train Gentilla any more. It is all most of us can do to take care of ourselves, and we think Gentilla is a nice little girl just as she is now, don't we?"

Susan nodded soberly. Much nicer than Susan Whiting, she thought, as she remembered slapping and pushing and knocking Gentilla down.

But she brightened when Grandmother added:

"Hurry now and dress yourself. We are all invited over to Mrs. Vane's for tea, Grandfather and all. And you are going to wear your new dress with the little pink flowers. I put the last stitch in it for you not five minutes ago."

CHAPTER IX—HICKORY DICKORY DOCK

It was a stormy autumn afternoon, and Phil sat in his rocking-chair before the red coal fire watching the clock upon the mantelpiece. He hoped it would strike soon and tell him what time it was, for he was expecting company, and he felt that he had already waited quite long enough.

He looked round the nursery and saw that everything was in its place, spick and span and ready for visitors, too. The big dapple gray rocking-horse stood in

his corner, his fore feet impatiently lifted and an eager gleam in his brown glass eye. No doubt he was anxious to do his part by giving the visitor as many rides as she wished.

The tin kitchen, with its gay blue oven, was polished until it sparkled and glittered like precious stones. The kitchen was a favorite toy with Phil. He never tired of making strange little messes of pounded crackers and water, that smelled of the tins they were cooked in, and tasted no one but Phil could say how, for no one but he would eat them.

His big electric train, running on real tracks, a present from Great-Uncle Fred, was nicely set up in the middle of the floor, and looked as if it could take you to Jericho and return in one afternoon. Little black Pompey in a red-and-white striped minstrel suit, high hat on head, looked anxiously from the cab of the engine, for, as engineer, was he not responsible for the safety of a whole family of paper dolls who occupied an entire passenger car and who seemed not at all concerned at the delay in starting?

The nodding donkey, the dancing bear, the flannel rabbit with only one ear, stood stiffly on parade. The box of tin soldiers and sailors lay invitingly open.

Yes, everything was ready, even to the big sailboat that leaned against the wall, canvas spread to catch the first salt breeze. And best of all, there stood the low nursery table covered with a spotless white cloth, a sight which promised such a pleasant ending to what was sure to be a pleasant afternoon that Phil treated himself to a violent rocking as a way of working off his emotion.

For Phil had been ill in bed, and this was his first taste of fun in two whole weeks. He had looked forward mightily to this very moment, and his mother's promise that he should have a party as soon as he was well had helped, more than anything else, to make the big spoonfuls of black medicine go down without a struggle.

Phil's cheeks were white and his face was thin, and he wore for warmth his manly little blue-and-white checked bathrobe, since only last night his cough had been croupy again. Not that Phil called it his bathrobe. In admiring imitation of his father's lounging costume he called it his "smoking-jacket," and he had even had the daring to slip a match or two into the deep side pocket, in which he fervently hoped no one might pry. If Phil's mother had even suspected such a thing, he and the matches would have parted company speedily, he well knew. He meant to slip them safely back as soon as the party was over, and no one would be the wiser or harmed in the least by what he had done, he thought. He smiled to himself as he fingered the forbidden objects that nestled so innocently in his pocket and gave him such a jaunty grown-up feeling.

And, in Phil's secret heart, there was another reason why he was happy this afternoon. Gentilla had gone away.

It was not that Phil didn't like Gentilla, for he did. He had played happily with her and Susan through the long summer days that the little girl had spent in Featherbed Lane. He had enjoyed, he thought, the long stay Gentilla had made with the Whitings when her gypsy relatives had disappeared in the night and had never been heard of from that time to this.

But at last Gentilla's visit had come to an end. Mr. Drew knew of a Home for little children who needed some one to love and care for them. And so, one bright October day, the good minister took the little gypsy girl to her new home where she would lead an ordered, comfortable life quite different from the rough-and-tumble days she had known in gypsy van or camp.

At parting, Phil had presented Gentilla with his treasured Noah's ark because she loved it so. He would willingly have given her his express wagon, in which he had treated her to many a ride, if his mother hadn't explained that it would not go into Gentilla's tiny trunk which her kind friends were filling for her with a neat little outfit. He stood upon the station platform, loyally waving his hat until the train was quite out of sight.

And it was not until then that he learned how pleasant it was to have an undivided Susan for a playmate once again, a Susan who was always glad to see him, who never whispered secrets and wouldn't tell, who never ran away from him, and who, in short, was to be the chosen guest of honor that very afternoon.

"It must be most supper-time," grumbled Phil. "I wish the clock would strike, or Susan would come, or something would happen."

The clock on the mantel began a whirring and creaking that caused Phil to spring to his feet and fasten his eyes upon the little Roman soldier in helmet and shield, who stood alert, both day and night, atop the clock, ready to strike the hours as they came. The whirring grew louder. Slowly the little Roman soldier raised his arm and loudly struck his shield once, twice. Two o'clock!

"Time for Susan," said Phil joyfully.

He dragged a low cricket to the window, and, standing upon it, looked out at the sodden brown lawn, the leafless trees rocking in a late October gale, and the gray windswept sky. Big raindrops hurried nowhere in particular down the window-pane, and Phil amused himself by racing them with his finger. And presently he spied Susan.

"Come on, come on!" he shouted, knocking on the window, quite careless of the fact that Susan couldn't possibly hear him. "I've been waiting forever. Come on!"

The little figure in blue waterproof cape and hood, Susan's pride, hurried down to the stone wall, through the gap, and across Phil's lawn. Here was a puddle, and the blue waterproof hopped nimbly over it. Just one peep into the empty dog kennel, and Phil heard the side door shut, and knew that Susan would

be there in a moment.

He waited impatiently, his eyes at the crack of the nursery door, since the cold halls were forbidden him. He heard Susan and his mother talking, and at last up she came, a box under her arm.

"See what I've brought," said Susan. "Grandmother sent it. And your mother gave me some, just now, too. We will each have a long string of them."

Susan sat down on the hearth-rug and opened the box. It was full of buttons, large and small, dull and bright, white and colored, and these she poured out in a little heap upon the floor.

"Grandmother sent a long thread for each of us," and Susan pounced upon a small parcel at the bottom of the box. "She told me how to do it, too. You string the buttons, as many as you like, and one of them is your 'touch button.' You must never tell which one that is, because who ever touches that button must give you one of his. Do you see?"

"But won't you even tell me, Susan?" asked simple Phil, who wanted to share all things with his friend, even to dark mysteries like "touch buttons."

"Why, yes," said Susan generously, "if you will tell me yours."

Phil nodded and rummaged in the button heap.

"These are good ones," said he, ranging them on the floor before him. "I'm going to begin to string."

Phil's taste was severe. He had chosen several large, dark, velvet buttons, a brass military button, a useful black button or two that might have come from his father's coat, a flat silver disk as big as a dollar, and, as a lighter touch, all the buttons he could find covered with a gay tartan plaid gingham.

Susan uttered cries of delight as she rapidly made her selection.

"Look at these blue diamonds," she exclaimed rapturously over some glass buttons that had seen better days. "And here is one with beautiful pink flowers painted on it. Here is a white fur one off my baby coat, and these little violet-and-white checks are from Grandmother's gingham dress. I know they are."

"Now this is the grandmother," she went on, taking up a fat brown doorknob of a button. "I'll put her on my string first of all, so that she can take care of the rest of them. And next I'll put this little green velvet one so that it won't be lonesome."

"Which is your touch button?" asked Phil, after working busily in silence for a whole minute.

"Shh-h-h!" warned Susan, looking carefully about her before answering, as if a spy might be peeping through the keyhole or even hiding behind the one-eared rabbit. "This one. It's my favorite, too." And she touched a hard little rose-colored ball that looked uncommonly like a pill. "Which is yours?"

Phil proudly displayed the military button, and whirled away from Susan just in time to keep the secret from his mother who entered the room, bearing a

tray.

"Are you ready for your refreshments?" she asked, setting her burden down upon the table. "Oh, let me see your button strings."

She took both strings in her hand to look them over, and to the delight of the children she touched both of the charmed buttons.

"Touch! Touch!" they cried, capering about like wild Indians. "You touched the 'touch button.' You owe us one now."

"So I do," said Mrs. Vane, laughing. "I had forgotten all about 'touch buttons.' I shall be more careful after this. You won't catch me again. Now, Phil, there are your refreshments, so draw up to the table whenever you are ready. I must go look for buttons to pay my debt!"

Mrs. Vane, still laughing, took the tray and went downstairs.

Susan and Phil found themselves ready for the refreshments and made haste to set the little table with the green-and-white china tea-set. The dinner plates were quite large enough to hold the sponge cakes, and if the tea-cups seemed a trifle small, think how many more times the brimming pitcher of lemonade would go round.

Phil set out four plates instead of two.

"We will each ask one company to come to the table," said he. "I want the rocking-horse, he looks so thirsty, and your grandfather always stops to give Nero a drink when we go riding."

And Phil dragged his steed over to the table, where he rocked back and forth for a moment bumping his nose against the edge of the table each time. Indeed, with his open jaws and bright red nostrils, he looked as if a whole trough of lemonade would be needed to slake his thirst.

"I'll take the bunny because he has only one ear," said tender-hearted Susan.

As she stooped to pick up the rabbit, she uttered a scream and sent poor bun flying half-way across the room. A small brown object, far more frightened than Susan, sped like a streak of lightning along the wall, and disappeared into the big closet where Phil kept his toys.

"What is it? What is it?" cried Phil, for Susan was jumping up and down with her hands over her ears.

"It's on me! It's on me!" cried Susan, shuddering and shaking. "It's a mouse! It's a mouse!"

"It isn't on you," said Phil. "Don't cry, Susan. I saw him go in the closet. I'll fix him, you see."

With a bravery worthy of a better cause Phil opened the closet door, struck one of his precious matches, threw it into the closet after the mouse, and firmly shut the door.

"There now," said he. "I fixed him."

"What did you do?" quavered Susan, opening one eye. "Are you sure he isn't on me? Look."

"I killed him," returned Phil briefly.

"How?"

"I burned him up," answered Phil in a deep voice.

"Really?" said Susan, awed. "But won't it set the house on fire?"

"No," said Phil stoutly. "It won't. I mean I don't think it will. Maybe we had better look and see. You look, Susan."

On the floor of the closet stood an open Jack-in-the-box, and it was upon poor Jack's hat that the match had alighted. Jack had bushy white hair, and an equally bushy beard, and he was blazing merrily, grinning like a hero all the while, when Susan opened the door.

Susan's heart stood still. Oh, if Mrs. Vane were only there!

"Run, Phil!" she called. "Run for your mother!"

And then with a presence of mind that, when he heard the tale, Grandfather considered remarkable, she picked up the pitcher of lemonade and emptied it over the blaze.

Phil ran screaming downstairs.

"The house is on fire and the mouse is burned up! Mamma, Mamma, come quick! The mouse is on fire and the house is burned up!"

When Mrs. Vane reached the nursery, she found the fire out, the closet floor covered with lemonade, Jack-in-the-box burned to a crisp, and Susan, with shining eyes, not knowing whether to laugh or cry, but able after a moment to tell her story.

"But, child," said Mrs. Vane, when she had made sure that the fire was completely out and that the only article damaged was the unfortunate Jack-in-the-box, "which one of you had matches, and what has become of Phil? Who had the match, Susan?"

Ah, that was the question that Phil dared not face, and that had caused him to hide himself securely behind the big sofa in the parlor where no one went in cold weather except for a special reason.

But at last he was found, and, standing before his mother, listened with drooping head to the truths his own conscience had already told him.

"I think you have found out for yourself, Phil, why a little boy should never touch matches," said Mrs. Vane soberly. "If it hadn't been for Susan, our house might have been burned to the ground. I'm sure I don't know what your father would say if he were here."

Phil's eyes grew glassy at the very thought, but he said nothing. Indeed, there was nothing he could say in excuse.

"You have spoiled your party, and ruined your Jack-in-the-box," went on his

mother. "And, now, after hiding so long in that chilly room, you will have to go straight to bed so that you won't take cold."

At this Phil's tears burst forth, and Susan was moved to pity.

"Oh, dear," said she, with an arm about Phil's heaving shoulders, "he will never touch the matches again, will you, Philly? Tell your mother you won't."

"N-n-no," blubbered Phil dismally.

Mrs. Vane smiled down at the small sinner's comforter.

"It seems too bad that Susan shouldn't have her refreshments," she remarked,—"especially since she put out the fire."

And in a very few moments Susan was sitting on the edge of Phil's bed, and both were drinking hot chocolate and eating the party sponge cakes.

"Hadn't you better thank Susan for putting out the fire and saving our house from burning down?" asked Mrs. Vane, as, a little later, she helped Susan into her waterproof. She wanted to drive the lesson home, and impress upon Phil's mind the danger they had so narrowly escaped.

"Thank you, Susan," returned Phil obediently. "But I'm going to do something nice for you to-morrow," he added. "I'm going to give you my 'touch button,' you see."

CHAPTER X—THE VISIT

Grandfather and Susan were going on a visit to the Town of Banbury.

They were to stay at the house of Grandfather's friend, Mr. Spargo, and Susan was delighted at the thought, for once Mr. Spargo had spent a whole week at Featherbed Lane and with him had come his little daughter Letty, just Susan's age.

Susan remembered the good times they had had together, and now she could scarcely wait for the day to come when she would see Letty Spargo again.

They were going to Banbury, she knew, because Grandfather had a "case" at the Banbury Court-House. Susan thought of this "case" as a big black bag something like the suitcase Grandfather was to carry on the visit. Sometime she meant to ask why he kept a "case" so far away from home in Banbury; but now that question must wait, for she was very busy deciding just which of her belongings

she would take with her on the journey.

Susan didn't trouble her head about dresses; Grandmother would attend to that, she knew. Her difficulty lay in making up her mind which of her toys to take with her, and Grandmother looked with dismay at the pile on Susan's bed, a pile which, as Susan ran blithely up and down stairs, grew larger with every trip.

"Susan, child," said Grandmother, "what are your washboard and tub doing on the bed here, and this box of blocks, and your flat-iron? Are you thinking of taking them to Banbury? You will need a Saratoga trunk, if you keep on."

"I thought Letty would like to see them," faltered Susan, halting with an armful in the doorway.

"So she will, when she comes to visit you," answered Grandmother. "It is your turn now to see her toys. And I should leave Flip and Snowball home, too, if I were you. You will be gone only four or five days, a week at the most, you know."

"I am afraid they will miss me," said Susan, coming forward to look wistfully at her pile of treasures.

"No, they won't," said Grandmother, shaking her head with decision. "They will be all the more glad to see you when you come home again. And they will be company for me, too. You don't want to leave me entirely alone, do you?"

"Oh, Grandmother!" cried Susan, her tender heart touched. "I don't want to leave you home alone at all. I won't go. I won't go one step." And she caught Mrs. Whiting's hand and patted it gently against her cheek.

"Nonsense, Susan," answered Mrs. Whiting, smiling down upon her granddaughter. "How do you suppose Grandfather would get along without you to take care of him? And I expect to be too busy to be lonely. I hope to finish my braided rug while you are gone."

So Susan decided that, after all, she would go with Grandfather, and that Grandmother must be left in Flip and Snowball's special charge.

"Take good care of Grandmother, and be good children yourselves," whispered she a day or so later, as she ran into the little sewing-room to bid them good-bye. Flip and Snowball had been placed on top of the sewing-machine so that they might easily guard Grandmother as she braided her rug. "Kiss me good-bye and look at my new hat." And Susan stole an admiring glance in the mirror at her new squirrel cap.

She felt very proud of her cap, with tippet and muff to match, and once on the train she sat up stiff and prim hoping some one would say:

"Who is that good little girl in the squirrel furs?"

But after waiting a whole minute to hear the flattering comment which did not come, Susan turned to look out of the window, and sensibly forgot about herself and her furs as she gazed at the world whirling past.

She was so interested in all she saw that the journey seemed a short one, and she could scarcely believe it was over when Grandfather folded his paper and lifted down the suitcase from the rack over his head.

But there on the platform stood Letty, smiling shyly and holding fast to her father's hand, and, what seemed really wonderful to Susan, Letty wore a little squirrel cap and tippet and muff like her own.

"We are twins!" cried Susan in an ecstasy of joy, as arm in arm they walked up the street behind Grandfather and Mr. Spargo.

Her eyes were glancing hither and thither as she surveyed the neat red-brick houses, with white front door and glistening white doorstep, each in its own spacious garden plot, that made up street after street in Banbury Town.

"We are real twins," agreed Letty, her blue eyes shining and her yellow curls dancing as she nodded eagerly at Susan. "And we are going to sleep together; Mother said so. And I asked Annie what was for dinner to-night, but all she would tell me was 'Brussels sprouts' and 'Queen of Puddings.' You like Queen of Puddings, don't you?"

Susan admitted that she liked Queen of Puddings. She had never before heard of "Bussels sprouts," but, if asked, she would willingly have said that she liked them too, so happy was she to be in Banbury and visiting Letty Spargo.

"But I haven't told you the nicest yet, Susan," went on Letty, squeezing her visitor's arm as she talked. "There is going to be a Fair in our church two days after to-morrow, and there is going to be a Blackbird Pie. Mother is going to have it, Mother and Miss Lamb. Miss Lamb is my Sunday-School teacher. And they are making the curtains for it now, red curtains with big blackbirds flying all over them. Now aren't you glad you came to see me?"

Susan's head was whirling. What was a blackbird pie, and why should a pie have curtains?

At dinner, Susan discovered that "Bussels sprouts" were like baby cabbages, but it was not until later in the evening that Mrs. Spargo, seeing Susan's bewilderment at Letty's talk of the Blackbird Pie, made clear the mystery to her.

"It is not a real pie, Susan," said she. "It is going to be the largest dishpan we can buy, covered with paper to look like a pie and filled with little articles and toys that cost five or ten cents each. You will pull a string, and out of the pie will come something nice. And the blackbird curtains are to drape the booth. Do you understand?"

Susan smiled up into Mrs. Spargo's face. Already she felt at home with Letty's mother. And she liked Letty's baby, too, a fat, good-natured blue-eyed baby, not quite two years old, who poked his fingers into everything and who never cried no matter how many times he sat down hard on the floor with a thump.

"He is a little bit banty because he is fat. That is why he sits down so hard. But I like babies to be banty," said Letty loyally.

"I do too," agreed Susan. "They are much nicer that way."

The next morning before sun-up, Letty and Susan were awake, both very much surprised to find themselves side by side in bed.

"I knew I was here when I went to sleep," said Susan, rubbing her eyes and staring round, "but when I woke up I thought I was home."

"No, you are here," said Letty, sitting up on top of her pillow as if it were a stool and speaking earnestly. "Now I'll tell you what I thought, Susan. You know the Fair is only one day after to-morrow now. Don't you think we ought to begin to save right away so that we can have lots of pulls at the Blackbird Pie? And there will be ice-cream, too, and other good things, I know. Have you any money?"

Susan was as business-like as Letty.

"Yes, plenty," she answered, slipping out of bed.

And a moment later, she and Letty were gazing into the depths of her little green handbag where shone three bright new ten-cent pieces.

"Good," said Letty. "Just think how much we can buy with that. Now I haven't any money at all. But Father comes home to lunch every day, and we will be there to meet him when he comes up the street. I will ask him for some money then, and when he goes back to the office after luncheon I will ask him for more. He will never remember," said Letty, with a confidence born of experience. "He is a very absent-minded man. My mother herself says so."

Susan was charmed with this idea.

"Shall we keep it all in my pocketbook?" she asked. Already she could see its green sides bulging with riches.

Letty twisted a curl and pondered.

"No," she decided at last, "for you might take it out in the street with you and lose it. I'll show you where we will keep our money."

And on tiptoe for fear of waking the baby, she crept into the nursery next door and back.

"Here! just the thing," said she, displaying a little round white jar decorated with a bunch of scarlet holly berries and prickly green leaves.

"We can keep our money in this, because it is mine. No one will touch it. And we will put it on the end of the mantelpiece in the nursery, up high where the baby can't reach it. Shall we do that?"

In answer, Susan shook her three ten-cent pieces into the jar, and with head on one side admired the effect.

"But if any one looks in he will see the money, and maybe ask what it is for. Then we can't keep it a secret," she objected.

Letty, with finger on lip, tiptoed into the nursery again, and returned with

a doll's brown-and-white checked sunbonnet in her hand.

"It belongs to the baby's doll, Lolly," said she. "I just snatched up the first thing I could find. We will stuff it into the jar on top of the money, and if people see it, they will think we have left it there careless-like."

The sunbonnet was tucked into the jar, and the little girls felt perfectly sure that no one would suspect the presence of money under it.

"It does look put there careless-like, doesn't it?" repeated Letty.

She liked to use those words which she had borrowed from Annie the cook. Many times had she heard Annie say, "I think I'll toss off a pudding, careless-like, for dinner," or, "I'll give the room a little dusting, careless-like, before your mother comes home," and she admired the turn of expression.

At noon that day, on his way home to luncheon, Mr. Spargo was warmly greeted by Letty and Susan halfway down the block and escorted to his own door. Upon Letty's whispering in his ear, he slipped two ten-cent pieces into her hand.

"One for each of you," said he, good-naturedly tweaking Letty's nose, red in the sharp November wind.

When he came out an hour or so later, he was in a hurry, and in answer to Letty's murmur he dropped a handful of small coins into her outstretched palm, and hastily departed without waiting for the chorus of thanks that followed him down the street and round the corner.

"Four pennies, two fives, and a quarter. As sure as I live, a quarter!" counted Letty. "Oh, Susan, Susan!" And flinging their arms about one another, the little girls hopped joyously about until Susan tripped and went down in a heap.

The girls found it hard to keep away from the little holly jar. The money was taken out and counted over and over each time the nursery was found unoccupied save by placid Johnny, who innocently played with his shabby Lolly or ran unsteadily about the room, bumping down and picking himself up undisturbed.

"Only to-day, and then to-morrow is the Fair," said Letty the next morning. "We must be sure not to miss Father at noon."

But to-day, of all days, Mr. Spargo did not come home to luncheon at all. He and Mr. Whiting were both busy with the mysterious "case" at Banbury Court-House.

Letty and Susan consoled themselves by counting the money and planning what they would buy with it.

"And there is still to-morrow before we go to the Fair," suggested Susan hopefully. "When are we going to tell, and show the bowlful? Maybe Grandfather will give us more when he hears about it."

Susan enjoyed having a secret with Letty, but she wanted to share it with Grandfather, too.

"We will tell when we are ready to start for the Fair," answered Letty firmly,

"and not a minute before. You never can tell what will happen."

But this plan was not carried out. Letty little knew how truly she spoke when she said "you never can tell what will happen."

The next day, the great Day of the Fair, the money was counted the first thing in the morning, as soon as Johnny had had his bath and Mrs. Spargo had left the room.

"Five tens, one quarter, two fives, and four pennies!" Susan and Letty had said it so often that they could repeat it backward. It had grown to be a chant that rang in their ears.

Half an hour later they stole back to count it again.

"Look," said Susan, stooping in the middle of the room. She held out the little brown-and-white sunbonnet that had hidden the money so "careless-like."

Letty ran to the mantelpiece. The jar was gone!

For an instant she and Susan stared at one another. Then they ran wildly about the room looking in every nook and corner for the missing jar, much to baby Johnny's entertainment. He sat on the floor sucking his fingers, and he laughed and chuckled and kicked his heels up and down as he watched the exertions of his sister and her friend.

"Here it is," called Letty at last. "By the doll's bed." And from under the bed, where slumbered Lolly face downward, out rolled the little holly jar.

"But where is the money?" demanded Letty. Her first fright over, she was growing angry.

"There is something in Johnny's mouth," announced Susan.

With a practiced hand, Letty put her finger into the baby's mouth and out came the quarter.

"Oh, you! You!" cried Letty. Her face grew pink and she gave Johnny a shake that sent him backward upon the floor.

Treated so unkindly and robbed of his new plaything, Johnny burst into a wail that brought his mother hurrying to his side.

While she listened to Susan and Letty, who both talked at once in their excitement, Mrs. Spargo was feeling carefully in Johnny's mouth and, when at last she spoke, she said:

"The first thing to do is to find the money, for until we do I shall be afraid that Johnny has swallowed some of it. Do you know how much you had?"

"Five tens, one quarter, two fives, and four pennies," answered Susan and Letty in a breath.

Mrs. Spargo smiled.

"Here is the quarter," said she. "Now we must all hunt for the rest of the money."

"How did Johnny reach up to the mantelpiece?" demanded Letty. "We have

to stretch and stretch, and we put the jar there on purpose because it was so high."

Mrs. Spargo pointed to a chair, and Johnny, taking the hint, in a short time, in spite of his bandy legs, had hitched and pulled himself up until he stood upon the seat. He laughed and clapped his hands and made a sudden spring at his mother who caught him just in time to save him from a fall.

"Rascal," said she, patting him on the back as he clung to her. "That is how he did it. Now we must all look for the money."

It was surprising the number of places Johnny Spargo had contrived to hide the money.

Four ten-cent pieces were found in Letty's doll carriage; three pennies were under the rug; one five-cent piece was on the window-sill; the other in the express wagon. But one penny and a ten-cent piece were still missing.

"Oh, Johnny, did you swallow them?" asked Mrs. Spargo.

But Johnny, not being able to talk, only laughed and hid his face in his mother's neck.

Susan and Letty were crawling about the floor on their hands and knees when Mrs. Spargo had a bright thought.

She unbuttoned Johnny's little brown shoe, and there, tucked in the side, was the penny.

"Now only the ten cents is lacking," said Mrs. Spargo. "How happy I shall be if we find it and I know he has not swallowed it."

But it seemed as though the ten-cent piece was not to be found. Everything was turned upside down and shaken, furniture was moved, corners were brushed out, but no piece of money came to light.

At last Susan and Letty dismantled the doll's bed, and vigorously shook and flapped each little sheet and blanket. Letty fell upon the pillows and beat them violently, while Susan rescued poor Lolly from under foot, and, holding her out of the baby's reach, danced her up and down to Johnny's great delight.

He stretched out his hands for his dolly, and just then Susan gave a cry of joy.

"I've found it! It's here! It's inside Lolly. Feel! Feel! It's here!"

Sure enough, through a hole in poor old Lolly's back Johnny had poked the ten-cent piece, and there it lay embedded in dolly's soft cotton inside.

"I'm so glad," said Mrs. Spargo, "and so relieved. I felt that it simply must be found, and now here it is. My precious Johnny! You didn't swallow it after all."

And Mrs. Spargo hugged Johnny as if he had done something very wonderful indeed, instead of turning his nursery topsy-turvy for half an hour.

"I feel the same way," confided Letty to Susan in a low voice, "for I didn't know what kind of a time we would have at the Fair to-night if we didn't find that ten-cent piece."

CHAPTER XI—HOW THE MONEY WAS SPENT

It was the night of the Fair.

Letty and Susan, on tiptoe with excitement and carefully carrying the green leather bag between them, walked to the church behind Mrs. Spargo and Miss Lamb, whose Blackbird Pie was all ready and waiting for customers.

In the green pocketbook reposed the "five tens, one quarter, two fives, and four pennies."

"See that star, Letty?" asked Susan, holding tight to Letty's arm as she gazed up at the moon, half hidden in the clouds, and at a single star that shone near by. "Let's wish on it."

"Star light, star bright,
First star I've seen to-night,
I wish I may, I wish I might
Have the wish I wish to-night"—

recited the two little girls in chorus.

There was silence for a moment, and then Susan whispered:

"What did you wish, Letty?"

"Will you tell me if I tell you?" was Letty's reply.

Susan nodded, and bent her ear invitingly to her friend's lips.

"I wished that we would have a good time at the Fair," whispered Letty.

"So did I!" cried Susan, opening her eyes wide. "So did I! Isn't it strange that we always think of the same thing? We must be really truly twins."

"We are," answered Letty with conviction. "I do wish you weren't going home to-morrow. I wish you could stay here forever."

Here Mrs. Spargo and Miss Lamb turned in at the church gate, gayly illumined to-night for the Fair by a colored lantern, and the "twins" followed close

on their heels down a narrow stone walk and through a side door into the lecture-room of the church.

"This is the Sunday-School room," whispered Letty. "There is my seat over in the corner. Oh, look, look! There is the Blackbird Pie."

And, sure enough, in the very corner where Letty sat every Sunday morning in company with four other little girls and Miss Lamb, stood a booth draped with scarlet curtains over which winged a gay flight of blackbirds. And best of all, there was the Blackbird Pie in the midst, so enticing with its profusion of strings, so mysterious with its hidden treasure of "toys and small articles for five and ten cents," that Susan and Letty made a bee-line in that direction determined to spend all their wealth on that particular attraction.

"Give me your hats and coats, girls," said Mrs. Spargo. "And if I were you, I would walk around the room first and see what there is for sale before I spent my money here."

"Oh, just one pull, just one pull," clamored the little girls, gazing at the fascinating Pie with eager eyes.

Mrs. Spargo laughed.

"Red strings are five cents, white ones are ten," said she. "Pull away!"

The green pocketbook was opened and the bankers peered inside just as if they didn't already know the contents by heart.

"There are the two fives," said Letty who thought herself quite a business woman. "Let us spend them now and get rid of them."

So, after studying the Pie from all angles, two red strings that seemed especially desirable were chosen; and, grasping them firmly and shutting their eyes, Susan and Letty each pulled on her own string and out came two little parcels, neatly wrapped in scarlet paper.

"Look, look!" called Susan, poking a small plaid box, that held four colored pencils, in Letty's face.

"See mine, see mine!" answered Letty, returning the compliment by thrusting under Susan's nose a tiny doll's pocketbook, just big enough to hold a cent.

"I like mine best," said Susan contentedly.

"I do too," responded Letty.

And, thoroughly satisfied, they set off hand in hand on a tour of the room.

The handkerchief-and-apron table they passed by with scarcely a glance. That booth might be interesting to grown people, but they didn't intend to spend any of their money upon such useful, everyday articles.

The fancy table came next in their wanderings, and Susan and Letty, though admiring the embroidered sofa cushions, the lace table-covers, and the satin work-bags, knew that they could never afford such splendors.

"They must cost a hundred dollars," said Letty, who, since it was her church

and therefore her Fair, so to speak, felt that she must supply Susan with information.

"Maybe we can find a little present here for your mother and for Grandmother," said the country mouse to the city mouse in a low voice.

The city mouse nodded in reply and stood on tiptoe for a better view. It had been decided before leaving home that a present should be bought for Mrs. Spargo and one for Mrs. Whiting.

"There seem to be little things down at this end," announced Letty. "Come on. I'm going to ask."

And, catching the eye of one of the ladies in charge, she piped up:

"Please, have you any presents here for about ten cents? We want one for my mother and one for Susan's grandmother."

"Ten cents?" said the lady, shaking her head. "I'm afraid not. But let me look about and see."

Presently she returned with a handful of articles which she placed before her small customers.

"I've nothing for ten cents," said she kindly. "But here are several articles for twenty-five and thirty and fifty cents."

"Oh, Letty, I want that for Grandmother," said Susan, forgetting both her shyness and her manners as she pointed a forefinger at an object which she felt sure would delight Grandmother beyond words.

It was a pale-blue stocking-darner with a little girl painted on one side and a little boy on the other, and Susan knew in her heart that she would never be happy again unless she could carry it home to-morrow and place it in Grandmother's hands.

"That is twenty-five cents," said the lady, and she waited patiently while Susan and Letty put their heads together and consulted whether they ought to spend so large a sum.

At length Letty decided it.

"We will," said she recklessly.

So the stocking-darner was wrapped and tied and handed over to Susan, who, without a single qualm, watched Letty take the precious quarter from its resting-place in the green pocketbook and hand it across the counter. It was money well spent, she thought.

"Now we must buy something for my mother," said Letty. "How do you like this, Susan?"

It was a long purple box covered with bunches of violets and scrolls of gilt. In it were three cakes of strongly scented violet soap.

"I like it," said Susan, sniffing vigorously. "The box is pretty, too. Maybe your mother will give it to you when it is empty."

"I will take this, please," said Letty, with the air of an experienced shopper.

And so easy and so delightful is it to form the habit of spending money that Letty and Susan didn't even blink when they heard the price, "thirty cents."

They moved on, laden with their bundles, their eyes glancing hither and thither as they missed nothing of the gay scene about them. The Fair was now at its height. Every one was either buying or selling or walking about, laughing and talking, and all displaying their purchases in such a holiday mood, that Susan, at least, felt that she had never been in such a festive scene before.

They had halted near the despised apron table when, glancing up, Susan spied above her head a doll made of Turkish toweling.

"Letty," said she, pulling at her friend's dress, "can't we buy that doll for Johnny? I know he would like it, and his old Lolly has a hole in her back."

So Letty, as spokesman and guardian of the pocketbook, bought and paid for the soft little dolly which fortunately proved to cost only ten cents.

Near the apron table was a half-open door which led into the church kitchen. In the kitchen stood the high freezers that supplied the popular ice-cream table, and, busily washing dishes with her back turned to the door, stood hard-working Swedish Mrs. Jansen, who was glad of the money that the church cleaning and any odd jobs might bring to her.

Her little girl Emmy, no older than Letty and Susan, stood at her elbow, ready to act as errand girl. And just at the moment that Susan and Letty caught sight of her, Emmy was in disgrace, for her mother turned angrily upon her and with her hard fingers snipped the sides of her flaxen head. Then she resumed her dish-washing, and Emmy slunk away to the door, where she stood rubbing her sharp little knuckles in her eyes and peeping out at the gay scene in which she had no part.

"Did you see that?" asked Letty indignantly. "Wasn't that the meanest?"

"Wasn't it?" answered Susan, her eyes round with sympathy. "Let's buy her a present."

Present-buying, if Susan had stopped to think, seemed to be somewhat like running downhill—not so easy at the beginning, but, once started, the simplest thing in the world.

And Letty was of one mind with her.

"Ice-cream," she decided. "And we will watch her eat it."

Glowing with patronage and generosity, and feeling as important as if they were treating a whole orphan asylum, Letty and Susan led the astonished Emmy across the room to the ice-cream table.

"The best ice-cream that you have for ten cents," ordered Letty largely.

And in a few moments they had the pleasure of seeing Emmy devour, in luscious mouthfuls, a large saucer of the pink-and-white frozen sweet.

"When are we going to have ours?" asked Susan, who began to think it would be fully as pleasant to sit down and eat ice-cream herself as to stand with hands full of bundles and watch some one else enjoying the treat.

"Right now," returned Letty, with an air of authority.

She opened the pocketbook as she spoke, but after a glance inside she turned a dismal countenance upon her friend.

"We've spent it," she faltered. "We've spent it all but four cents."

And she held the pocketbook, now woefully empty, so that Susan might see the sad truth for herself.

Susan stared blankly from the pocketbook into Letty's face.

"Won't we have any ice-cream at all, then?" she asked piteously.

Resourceful Letty turned and led the way down the room.

"We will just ask mother for some money," said she airily.

But alas for their plans! The Blackbird Pie was so popular, and both Mrs. Spargo and Miss Lamb were so occupied, that they did not even see Susan and Letty, who tried in vain to gain their attention.

They wandered back to watch Emmy finishing her ice-cream, quite innocent of the fact that her benefactors' feeling toward her had undergone a change.

"Greedy thing," said Letty spitefully. "See how she gobbles."

"She's spilling it," murmured Susan. "Look at her. Even Johnny wouldn't do that."

"Look, look!" gasped Letty. "Did you ever?"

For poor Emmy, to whom ice-cream was a rare treat, had lifted her saucer in both hands and was polishing it off with her little pink tongue, for all the world like a pussy-cat.

"Come along," said Letty impatiently. "We can buy some candy, anyway, with our four cents."

At the candy table another disappointment awaited them. They looked scornfully at the two squares of fudge which was all their four cents would buy for them.

"I never knew anything like it," scolded Letty, with her mouth full. "You can do a great deal better round the corner from home. It's only a penny a square and much nicer than this."

"Good-evening, young ladies," said a voice over their heads, "I hope you are enjoying the Fair to-night."

The little girls looked up into the face of the new minister, Dr. Steele, and Susan hastily licked off her finger-tips so that she might shake hands politely, while Letty choked on a large crumb of fudge and burst into a spasm of coughing.

"I hope you are both enjoying the evening," repeated Dr. Steele, pulling out his handkerchief and offering it to Letty, whose eyes were streaming with

tears and who had left her handkerchief in her coat pocket. He and Letty were old acquaintances, but it was Susan who answered his question, since Letty was unable to speak.

"We did have a good time," said Susan frankly, "until we spent all our money. But now we aren't having a good time, for our money is all gone and we haven't had a bit of ice-cream; not a bit."

"I'll tell you what it is," burst out Letty, who had recovered her voice. "I think everybody charged us too much for everything, and that is why we haven't any money left."

Dr. Steele's eyes twinkled.

"I have heard that complaint before about church fairs," said he. "Suppose you show me what you bought, and I will tell you whether I think you have been overcharged."

So Susan and Letty spread their purchases out upon a bench, and Dr. Steele sat down to look them over.

"The pencil box and the pocketbook were five cents apiece," began Letty. "But they are all right because Mother sold them to us. Then Susan bought a stocking-darner for her grandmother. Show it to Dr. Steele, Susan. That lady in a blue silk dress made her pay a quarter for it, and I think she asked too much. And she made me pay thirty cents for this present for my mother. I think she ought to give us some of the money back." And Letty shook her head wrathfully at the broad back of a placid, fair-haired lady who stood behind the fancy table.

Dr. Steele glanced at the lady and smothered a laugh. It was his own wife, Mrs. Steele, whom Letty had not recognized without a hat.

Dr. Steele admired both presents and looked at the price tags still tied to them.

"No," said he at last. "They are marked twenty-five and thirty cents. I don't think you were overcharged here. I think you have good value for your money. And you spent ten cents on a doll for the baby, and ten cents to treat a little girl to ice-cream, and four cents on candy for yourselves. No," repeated Dr. Steele soberly, shaking his head, "I think you have proved yourselves excellent shoppers, and that you have spent your money to very good effect. And I now invite both you young ladies to be my guests at the ice-cream table."

Dr. Steele rose, and escorted Susan and Letty across the room. He sat down between them, and, though he was able to eat only one plate of ice-cream while they easily devoured two apiece, he seemed to enjoy the treat quite as well as they.

When they had finished, there stood Annie in the doorway, waiting to take them home. Mrs. Spargo would stay until the Fair closed, and that would be too late for the little girls to be out of bed.

"Good-night," said Dr. Steele, shaking hands. "And remember what I told you. That you are excellent shoppers, and that you have good value for your money, very good value, indeed."

CHAPTER XII—THANKSGIVING IN FEATHERBED LANE

It was the morning of Thanksgiving Day, and Susan woke, sat up in bed, and looked about her. Beside her, on the quilt, lay the black-and-white shawl dolly, and, if you remember that she came out to play only when Susan was ailing, then you will know, without being told, that Susan had been ill.

Yes, for three whole days Susan had been in bed. But to-day she meant not only to be up and dressed, but to go downstairs as well, for to-day was Thanksgiving Day, and to stay in bed on such an occasion was something Susan didn't intend to do.

Four days ago Susan and Grandfather had come home from Banbury. They had arrived late in the evening, and Susan, tired out, had fallen asleep in her chair at the dinner-table, and had been carried up to bed without telling Grandmother a single word about her visit or even presenting her with the stocking-darner which she had carried in her hand all the way home from Letty's house.

Of the next two days all Susan could remember was a sharp pain and a big black bottle of medicine, with occasional glimpses of Grandmother and Grandfather tiptoeing about the darkened room.

But yesterday Susan had felt more like herself. She had enjoyed cuddling the shawl baby, she had eaten a plate of milk toast for her dinner, and she had given Grandmother a complete history of her visit from the moment she left Featherbed Lane until her return.

She had asked to see Flip, but Grandmother had said mysteriously that Flip, in her turn, had gone visiting, and that she wouldn't be back until dinner-time

Thanksgiving Day.

"When is Thanksgiving Day?" Susan had asked.

"To-morrow," Grandmother had answered, and Susan had sprung up in bed with a cry.

"Won't I be well to-morrow?" she asked imploringly. "Won't I be well for Thanksgiving Day?"

Grandmother at this moment was shaking the big black medicine bottle. It did seem to Susan that it was always medicine time, though Grandmother said it was marked on the bottle "To be taken every two hours."

Mrs. Whiting smiled at her tone of despair.

"I think so," said she encouragingly. "That is, if you take your medicine nicely," she added, approaching the bed with a large spoon in one hand and the bottle in the other.

Susan shut her eyes and opened her mouth. Down went the medicine, and, without a whimper and with only a wry face to tell how she really felt, Susan smiled bravely up at Grandmother.

"A good child," said Grandmother approvingly. "I'm sure you will be downstairs to-morrow."

Now to-morrow had come, and Susan, slipping out of bed and into her warm rosy wrapper and slippers, trotted downstairs in search of some one.

She found Grandmother quite alone, save for a delicious smell in the air of roasting turkey. Grandmother was busy baking, but she stopped long enough to help Susan dress and to answer a few of the questions that tumbled pell-mell from Susan's lips.

"Where is Grandfather? Gone to Thanksgiving service at church. You slept late this morning, Susan. When will Phil be home? Not for two weeks. They have all gone to his grandfather's for Thanksgiving, and they mean to visit his Great-Uncle Fred, who gave him his electric train, on their way back."

"Is any one coming here for Thanksgiving, Grandmother?" asked Susan, delicately eating a bowl of bread and milk for breakfast from one end of the table on which Mrs. Whiting was stirring up a cake.

"Miss Liza is coming," answered Mrs. Whiting, stopping her work and putting down her spoon. "I may as well tell you now, Susan, I suppose. Miss Lunette is married."

Susan looked at Grandmother for a moment without speaking. How unkind of Miss Lunette to have a wedding while she was away!

"Didn't she save me any cake?" she asked at length. "Did Phil go to the wedding?"

"There wasn't any wedding, Susan, or any cake," answered Mrs. Whiting. "No one was invited but Miss Liza. They stood up in the parlor and Mr. Drew

married them. Then they went off to Green Valley, where her husband lives."

"Maybe she will ask me to come to see her there," said Susan hopefully.

"Perhaps she will," said Grandmother. "It may be the making of her, Susan," she went on, half to herself. "She certainly was full of whims and crotchets, and would try the patience of any one but a saint like Miss Liza. Your Grandfather always said that all she needed was hard work, and I think she will have it now, for her husband was a widower with three children and an old mother, too. It may make a woman of her. I hope so, I'm sure. I know things won't be so hard for Miss Liza, and I'm glad of that."

And Grandmother beat her batter with such determination that her cheeks grew pink and her little white curls bobbed up and down in time with the beating.

"Is Flip coming with Miss Liza?" asked Susan.

"Um-um," was all Grandmother answered.

So Susan put away her little bowl and went into the front hall to call upon her friend the newel post.

"You ought to be dressed up for Thanksgiving," decided Susan, stroking her friend's bulky form. "Which do you like best, pink or blue? Pink, did you say? Then Snowball shall wear a blue ribbon and you shall have a pink one on your neck to celebrate the day."

Susan spent some time selecting and arranging the ribbons to suit the taste of all concerned. She then found the table set for Thanksgiving dinner, so she posted herself in the front window where she could look all the way down the lane to the gate and report to Grandmother the moment old Nero's Roman nose was visible.

She watched and watched, and at last they came jogging along, Miss Liza well wrapped up against the cold November air that had a "feel" of snow in it, and Grandfather wearing his fur-lined gloves for the first time this season, Susan observed.

In came Miss Liza, while Grandfather drove on to the barn, and to Susan's delight Miss Liza carried a big bundle which she placed in the little girl's outstretched arms.

"It's Flip," Susan repeated joyfully. "I know it's Flip. It's my Flip."

Yes, it was Flip, but a Flip so changed, so beautified, so transformed that only the members of her own family would have known her.

In the first place, her face and hands, which had grown a dingy brown, had become several shades lighter, producing a fresh, youthful appearance heretofore sorely lacking. Her bald head had blossomed out in a beautiful crop of worsted hair, in color a rich garnet-brown.

"Miss Lunette always used that color for her worsted hens," Miss Liza explained, "and I thought it would make real pretty-looking hair for Flip."

Susan was delighted with the effect. She smiled radiantly at Miss Liza. But when she examined her child's complete new wardrobe, she put Flippy down on the couch, and flung her arms first around Miss Liza and then about Grandmother's neck.

For Flippy wore a new set of underwear, even to a red flannel petticoat trimmed with red crocheted lace. She wore a brown cloth dress, elaborately decorated with yellow feather-stitching. But, most beautiful of all, about her sloping shoulders was a dark-blue cape, lined with scarlet satin and edged with narrow black fur; upon her head was tied a dark-blue fur-trimmed cap to match, from under which her garnet worsted hair peeped coyly; and, oh, crowning touch! about her neck upon a ribbon hung a black fur muff.

Susan's excitement and delight were such that even Thanksgiving dinner seemed of little importance compared with this unexpected trousseau of Flippy Whiting. Susan did manage to sit still in her chair at the table, but she turned every moment or two to smile happily upon Flip, who returned her glances with proud and conscious looks.

"One square inch of turkey for Miss Susan Whiting," announced Grandfather, when at last her turn came to be served, "and a thimbleful of mashed potato, one crumb of bread, and an acorn cup of milk. And that is all the dinner you get, if I have anything to say about it."

And Grandfather brandished the carving knife and looked so severe that Susan went off into a fit of laughter in which every one joined.

"Were there many out at church this morning?" asked Grandmother. "Was Mr. Drew's sermon good?"

"Oh, that reminds me," said Grandfather, "that I have to go out this afternoon. I promised Parson Drew that I would take something to eat down to the Widow Banks. The Young People's Society gave her five dollars to buy a Thanksgiving dinner for herself and her six children, and if she didn't go spend the five dollars on a crepe veil and a Bible."

Grandfather gave a chuckle as he thought of the surprise that the Widow Banks had given the Young People.

"I don't blame her," said he stoutly. "She probably takes more pride and pleasure in what she bought than we can imagine. The neighbors won't let her starve. You fix up a good basket for her, won't you, Grandmother?"

And that Mrs. Whiting did, though she shook her head over what she termed "extravagance and shiftlessness."

A little later, Susan and Mr. Whiting, who carried a large basket, the contents of which would mean far more to the six hungry Banks orphans than would a crepe veil and a Bible, started down Featherbed Lane on their charitable errand.

"The air will do Susan good," Grandfather declared. "And if she is tired, I

will carry her home. It isn't far, anyway."

Susan enjoyed both the walk and the short call they made at the dingy little white house in the Hollow.

Mrs. Banks, a thin, tearful wisp of a woman, with pale-blue eyes and untidy hair, gratefully accepted their offering; and the six sorrowful little Banks cheered up immediately when word went round as to what the basket held, so their visitors made haste to be gone, that they might be kept no longer from their Thanksgiving feast.

While Mr. Whiting talked to Mrs. Banks, Susan gazed round the poor little room, and eyed the Banks orphans standing in a row like steps, who, to do them justice, quite as frankly eyed her in return. The crepe veil was not in evidence, but on the mantelpiece lay the new Bible, black and shiny, and smelling powerfully of leather.

"Yes, six of them," said Mrs. Banks in her melancholy voice, waving her hand at the line, which looked more dejected than ever when attention was thus directed to it. "And not one of them old enough to do a stroke of work or to earn a penny."

"This is Richie," she went on, pointing to the tallest son of Banks, who dug his bare toes into the floor in an agony of embarrassment. "He's the flower of the family. He will amount to something. He never opens his mouth for a word. He's like me.

"And this is Mervin. He eats like a fish. And his brother Claudius is not far behind him. I gave them their names, for I do like a rich-sounding name. Mr. Banks wasn't of my way of thinking. He was all for plain, commonsense names. He named the next two,—Maria and Also Jane."

"'Also,' did you say?" inquired Mr. Whiting, who was thoroughly enjoying his call. "That is a name new to me."

"It was a mistake," explained Mrs. Banks dolefully. "The two girls were christened together, and, after Maria was baptized, the minister turned to Jane and, says he, 'Also Jane Banks,' and 'Also Jane' she has been to this day, for her father wouldn't go against the minister's word for anything in the world."

"What is the baby's name?" asked Mr. Whiting, preparing to depart.

"Her name is a compromise," answered Mrs. Banks, pulling out her damp handkerchief to wipe the baby's eyes which had instantly overflowed at hearing herself called a "mean name," as she whimpered into her mother's ear. "To please me we named her Cleopatra, but we always call her Pat, her father was such a one for plain names."

When Mr. Whiting and Susan reached home they found Grandmother and Miss Liza rocking placidly before a roaring fire, and room was made for Grandfather's chair with Susan on a cricket at his feet.

"Now, we will tell what we are most thankful for," said Grandmother, when the story of the call at the Banks' had been related, and a way of helping Mrs. Banks support her six children had been discussed. "You begin, Miss Liza."

"I'm thankful," said Miss Liza, without a moment's hesitation, "for good friends, for health, and a home."

"I'm most thankful," said Grandmother, "for Grandfather, and Susan, and a peaceful life. I couldn't live in strife with any one."

Grandfather thrust his boots out toward the fire and pulled his silk handkerchief from his pocket.

"I'm thankful," said he, carefully spreading his handkerchief over his head, "I'm thankful for my home, and that means Grandmother and Susan, and I'm thankful, too, that I have my own teeth. I mean it, I'm not joking." And he soberly snapped his strong white teeth together without a smile.

"I'm thankful," piped up Susan, glad her turn had come, "for Grandfather, and Grandmother, and Miss Liza, and Snuff, and Flip, and Nero, and—"

Grandfather caught her up from the cricket and held her in his arms.

"My black-eyed Susan," said he, tenderly.

Susan looked round with a smile.

"I think," said she,—"I think I'm thankful—why, I think I'm thankful for just everything."

THE END

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BLACK-EYED SUSAN ***

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